

faith in **focus**

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

VOLUME 31/1 FEBRUARY 2004



**"Do you not give the horse his strength
or clothe his neck with a flowing mane?"**

Job 39:19

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Whose party are you going to? <i>Uncovering a very present danger</i> | 3 |
| Not satisfied with Jesus? <i>When faith is not alone</i> | 7 |
| Sons of encouragement | 8 |
| World News | 9 |
| Breakthrough <i>The lesson in life</i> | 11 |
| Missions in focus <i>Growing the church in Karamoja</i> <i>Prayer points</i> <i>RCNZ food aid to Malawi</i> | 12 |
| Surfing the Net <i>The upside & downside of the Internet</i> | 15 |
| Church News <i>Gleanings in focus</i> | 17 |
| Books in focus <i>Preaching with spiritual vigour</i> | 18 |
| Home mission in focus <i>Dunedin, Wellington</i> | 20 |

All correspondence regarding editorial content and advertising should be sent to:

The Editor:

Sjirk Bajema
17 Phoenix Place, Papatoetoe,
Auckland.
Ph/Fax: +64 9 277 9360
Email: thirty@paradise.net.nz
Reformed Churches Home Page
<http://www.reformed-churches.org.nz>

Copy Deadline:

Six weeks preceding the month of publication.

All correspondence regarding distribution and payment of subscriptions to:

The Secretary:

Mrs Nicola Wharekawa
79 McLeod Street
Upper Hutt

Subscription per volume:

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

Production Staff:

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

Editorial

It was some years ago that a minister was overhearing several colleagues at a minister's conference speaking about several high-powered revival meetings they had experienced. They spoke in glowing terms of how warmly they felt and how much everyone there shared a wonderful spiritual unity.

This minister shared with them his own experience of a meeting he had come from the night before he flew over. He detailed the feelings he had when over 40,000 sang the same songs, held hands, and came away with a truly unforgettable event.

His colleagues now were completely captivated by his story. This was something extraordinary. And to hear all this from this man who otherwise you would think was the last to be open to such a move of the Spirit! They had to ask him who was the cause for this incredible time. Which special person's meeting was it? "Oh," the minister replied, "it was a Paul McCartney concert."

Naturally, those ministers felt somewhat taken in. And, indeed, they and many like them have been taken in. Because it has been the world that has stepped right in with such a theology of worship. A theology and practice that thorough researchers as Hank Hanegraaf and Daniel R. McConnell have shown to be quite clearly taken from a different basis than Scripture. And those authors are themselves pentecostal!

It's this increasingly dangerous attack of the subtle serpent that this issue leads off with. The 'worship wars' are becoming fiercer. And as those very much in this battle for the Bible - because that's what it's all about - let's make sure we're fully equipped. The sword of Spirit is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17).

*"Error makes the circuit of the globe
while Truth is pulling on her boots."*

Orestes Brownson

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

Whose party are you going to?

Uncovering a very present danger

Sjirk Bajema

We can easily be deceived about how the devil operates. When we think of him being engaged in this ongoing battle against our Lord and us as Christians, we can get the idea that it's quite an obvious thing. Something like in Matthew 4 when Satan was quite up-front about tempting the Lord, and isn't that, after all, how the apostle Peter describes the devil? In his first letter chapter 5, verse 8, he says that he is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

When we hear or read the latest ranting from Bishop John Spong, we think we've seen how Satan's working, because there's a man who obviously doesn't believe the Bible. He's written many books and articles declaring his heretical views. Everyone knows he doesn't believe in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, His resurrection, and personal sin.

Yet when a lion attacks, does its victim know he's been coming? Of course not — otherwise he would have got out of there quick-smart!

Being caught unawares

The testimony of Scripture is that the real danger is not a full-frontal attack by the devil, but something which catches us unawares. In fact, it is so subtle that even after it happens we might not realise.

In the psalms the most hurtful attack David spoke of came from one who was like a brother to him (cf. Ps.35:14). They had once been so close, but now he's suddenly and viciously turned on David!

Satan has worked so terribly in his attack against the Body of Christ in the past, and that attack is still with us today — indeed, it's very dangerous right now. That's because we're not seeing it! In fact, as the story of the serpent in Genesis 3 shows us, the attack will most likely be in something we wish for.

You may well be wondering now: What's going on?

The 'Christian-focused' perspective

There has come into evangelical Christianity a movement which we could term the 'Christian-focused' perspective. To illustrate this, let me tell of how a major Christian leader teaches concerning a parable of our Lord. This senior pastor, Brian Houston, who is also the present leader of his denomination, runs a conference each year in his church, which attracts 18,000 Christians from around the globe. And within

that huge attendance there are many from Reformed and Presbyterian churches, including their ministers and other leaders from local churches.

His church — Hillsong Church in Sydney, Australia — is also one of the largest Christian music publishers within Australasia. Their songs are very popular with young people. This includes young adults and not-so-young adults from confessional Calvinistic churches. And then there are his television programmes. Thousands more watch him on Sunday mornings and other times for the worship and teaching of his church.



Brian Houston wrote a book called, "*You Can Change The Future*". Its back-cover promotes it as suitable for anyone who wants more to life than a mundane, futile existence, and wonders how to achieve it. It says, "*You have the capacity to live a powerful, effective life that goes way beyond yourself. Take up the challenge of going beyond the limitations of the past, the excuses that may hold you back and begin to change the story of your life today.*"

In the section in the book entitled '*Change the Power of your Excuses*,' there is a chapter named '*Change your excuses*'. In this chapter you find his teaching about the parable of 'The Great Banquet' in Luke 14:15-24. This parable is really about being

trapped in an excuse mentality. He says that if we want to move on and up in the world we have to learn to come clean about the past. And excuses are the very things that stop us.

He writes, "*This parable gives three common excuses and typical defences why so many don't enter God's purpose and destiny for their life.*" The first excuse is concerning 'possessions' in verse 18. A man had brought some land, and wanted to go and see it.

The pastor goes on, "*If you have brought property, you will know how often you feel compelled to drive by and look at it. I know when I've been involved in building projects (either our own home or the church property) I find myself absorbed with watching the construction process, willing the workers to make faster progress. During the first phase of our church building, no matter where I was going, I always found some reason to drive by the land.*"

He draws out the meaning and concludes that while there's nothing wrong with purchases and investments, trouble begins when they become the pursuits that draw you away from the things of God. He challenges his audience as to whether or not their possessions are a help or a hindrance to the cause of the Kingdom.

A fair comment. Surely we can't disagree with that?

Seems to make sense

Next, he deals with the second excuse. This is about 'business,' in verse 19. This man had bought some oxen and wanted to check them out. So the lesson is that your vocation and career can become the excuse you use to miss the mark. This is what happens when people say, "I can't come, I have to work." He points to where the Bible says that we have to work to have the food we need to eat. But we have to check out that our work lines up with the word of God, and unless we're using our gifts and talents for God we're doing things to suit ourselves. It all sounds pretty logical, doesn't it?

And so we come to the third excuse. In verse 20 another man says, "I've just got married, so I can't come."

Ah, the pastor says, this is about 'relationships'. And here is a sad one. This couple have made time for the other important aspects in their lives. In fact, what's happening, he says, is that one of the spouses here has an unhealthy control over the other. They aren't allowing time for others, especially the Lord.

It's about changing your lifestyle

He concludes that possessions, work and relationships are typical of the reasons that hold people back today. But they are just excuses to stop them receiving God's blessing. They use excuses because it means they don't have to change their lifestyle.

All sounds like pretty good sense, doesn't it? I mean, Christianity is about a positive attitude towards things. Faith makes the most sense! We are drawn into Houston's up-beat, straight-forward advice.

Houston goes on to the rest of the parable, "*The excuses made by the property owner, the business man and the married man justified why they couldn't — or wouldn't — attend. Consequently, those invited to the party were the lame, the maimed and the blind. I've noticed that many who succeed in life are not necessarily the most gifted, or talented, or the best at what they do. Instead, it is those who symbolically represent the lame, the maimed and the blind who have refused to live under the grip of an excuse-mentality, who receive the rewards.*"

This is how he uses this parable in his teaching. This is the testimony of many people he's known who have taken hold of their lives and become incredible success stories — people who've turned financial disasters into corporate success, and people who have changed from physical or mental wrecks into healthy, self-confident individuals.

Noticed anything yet?

Have you begun to pick it up yet? Does it help that the company which published the book is called 'Maximised Leadership'? How about its Dewey library classification being 158 instead of 248? That puts it in the general self-help category rather than in personal Christian growth.

The reason why this is the 'Christian-

focused perspective' is because it could, just as easily, be a secular-focused perspective. The purpose revolves around what **you** can do. His approach to this parable is only one of many different ways it could be used. Indeed these verses have been used in various ways, depending on how people want to use them.

Scripture then becomes the place you go to after you've got your idea on what you want to do. Just like this pastor has done with the secular quotes which are used throughout the book to prove his point.

This shows us how the devil is distracting us. It is not treating the Word of God as God's Word.

You can hear that in many people's testimonies. That's another things that's become so popular amongst evangelical churches. People 'share'. You can hear some amazing stories of conversions or sudden blessings these days.

And it will be all from Scripture. You'll be told that those churches are 'standing on God's Word,' but what they mean is shown by their use of the Scriptures. What they mean is that **you** don't change your mind when you've asked for healing or something.

You say, "I'm not going to give in, I believe what God said, and I believe I'm healed (or whatever)". To them, standing on God's Word and keeping on standing on it means that God will be sure you have what **you** say.

This was illustrated by a situation where a woman aged 38 years wondered whether the Lord meant for her to go on the mission field. She was particularly concerned because at that age she felt middle-aged and a little old for missions. Well, in that time the Lord spoke to her. And He spoke to her using the words of the prophet Habakkuk. Habakkuk 3:2 in the King James says, "*O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years; in the midst of the years make it*

known."

There it was! Her clear call to go on the mission field! She was being called out of the midst — the middle — of the years. She, who was middle-aged!

We know she was not wondering at all; it was only just looking for an excuse!

The 'textually-related' informative

This is all about taking texts out of context. What sounds okay to begin with is taking us away from what the Bible is really saying. This is what we find when we look properly at our Lord's parable, because then we see that it isn't about the process involved in changing our own futures. The excuses in Luke 14 have nothing to do with being examples of those who won't succeed in life. In fact, if anything, those giving the excuses in this parable represent the most successful people in Jesus' day, as we observed in the earlier verses of Luke 14. For there, Jesus is dining with the Pharisees.

Now, if anyone was motivated the Pharisees were. They certainly knew how they could change their future! And it was actually through doing the kinds of things that Houston brings out in his book. For they accounted for every day and every minute in each day. They were vision-driven, and they certainly had power!

The first verse of our text, verse 15, has one of these men openly stating this. For when that Pharisee says, "*Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God,*" he's referring to himself and other 'respectable' Jews having a part in the Messianic celebrations. He hasn't got the point of what Jesus has said so far. So, Jesus tells this parable.

Because this parable is about the Gospel. It's the warning that if they don't accept His invitation they could miss the blessings of the kingdom of God. Those making excuses



in verses 18 to 20 are those who have already heard the Gospel. They represent those who, for thousands of years, have been the recipients of God's special favour — they symbolise the Jewish people.

These men have had the Gospel proclaimed to them. The prophets have brought God's Word to them. At the time of this parable they had the Old Testament scriptures, also written in Greek.

The Jewish custom was to have two invitations to important occasions. They had received the first invitation, and now came the second. The venue and time of this great banquet is spelt out clearly.

But Israel doesn't want to know. Those who are in the know have got somewhere else to go! They don't want a bar of God's Son and the salvation found in His Name alone! They reject the final invitation given through John the Baptist, and by Jesus Himself.

In accordance with biblical prophecy, then, the invitation now goes out to the least likely. The very ones in society who have no way at all of succeeding. Unlike our time, when the handicapped are able to get out of "the grip of an excuse-mentality," disabled people in first-century Palestine were considered cursed. They or their parents were believed to have done something terribly wrong in their lives. The poor fit in here as well — they're the ones who haven't done anything with their lives!

One clear meaning

A parable generally has one clear meaning. If this parable is about the Gospel invitation now going to outside of the 'righteous' Jews — whether economically or ethnically — how does it come to be used in this new and different way?

Well, it's not actually a new way. We saw that when we realised the devil has been pulling this trick for thousands of years already. But it does come with this modern mask. For what could be more contemporary than being part of a motivational package?

It's missed the true meaning, though. We have to wonder how the Lord Jesus fits in, because in the book by Brian Houston, Christ is really only an add-on. At the most, His Name is some kind of magical mantra.

A different testimony

This was shown through what happened in the life of the person who was formerly the musical director at this mega-church — Geoff Bullock. He was responsible for many of those musical productions and publications. Some of his songs from his time continue to be very popular in evangelical churches.

He came to believe that he was caught up in a works-based, music-focused theology. He speaks as someone formerly bound by Old Testament ritual practice who has

discovered the cross, the fulfilment of Christ. He says that grace discovered him. He says, *"in discovering the truth, the absolute truth that God had come, God did have grace, God did have mercy, that God's attitude towards me had not changed one iota by my best work or by my worst, I was no more loved, I was no less loved, then suddenly everything I wanted to write was about what God had done, not about what I will or would do."*

The 'Christ-centred' directive

This is actually what this parable is about. For the Lord here doesn't teach the 'Christian-focused' perspective, but the 'Christ-centred' directive. Far from being a passage which can be taken any which way **you** want, these verses say only one thing — the very thing that matters for everything!

The teaching of our Lord here is what gripped the apostle Paul in Ephesians chapter 2. There he is absolutely clear that it is what Jesus Christ has done on the cross that has brought the Gentiles into the Church. As he says in verse 13, *"now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ."*

Isn't that exactly what Jesus is saying in verse 23? The servant there has brought in people despised in Jewish society. He has fulfilled what Romans 1 verse 16 says about the Gospel being brought first to the Jew. But now the servant tells his Master there's still room. And he is ordered, *"Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full."* After the Jews have rejected the Good News it goes out to the Gentiles.

We can certainly notice this often in Luke's Gospel. He, the Gentile Doctor, shows a deep concern for other gentiles to be healed — eternally!

Take note that those coming in are **made** to come in. This is no conscious choice. In fact, if it were left up to us there is no way we would come to faith. But it's what God has done — through Jesus Christ His Son! It's Christ's Spirit who makes His Word spring to life in our hearts and lives.

Brian Houston spoke about the need to make your mark on life. But the only mark you can put on your life is when you believe in a blood-stained cross and an empty grave. This demands that we confess our sinfulness. We cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" We condemned Him to die — we left Him hanging there. This humbles us - it leaves us so very, very low. We have absolutely nothing.

This is the 'Christ-centred' directive. It makes all the difference to the way we worship and serve God, because Christ's cross hangs right in the middle.

The Pharisees of Jesus' time mistakenly believed that what they did made them right with God. That didn't satisfy God, but only

led down a pathway of growing insecurity and ultimate failure. Many churches today are falling into that same trap. Bullock notes, *"They are singing, "I will lift up my voice", "I will worship", "I will bow down", "I will not let go", "I will hold on", "I surrender". But they're only trying to convince themselves that it's up to them to get God there. They have to plead for God's presence as if they haven't got it. They have to plead for God's favour as though they haven't got it. They plead for everything because it's easier to*



plead, and then when they feel like they've earned the answer everyone wants to lift their hands and sing something and feel God's response."

They connect what they have done with God's response. This account comes from a member of a Reformed church at that mega-church's Conference: *"People sung with so much gusto that you could see their faces shine with joy while worshipping the Lord in song. International speakers taught with so much passion we all cheered for them to go on."*

What they don't realise is that God's response is constant. He's going to respond whether you lift your hands and sing or not. But then they're probably trapped. *"Because you think that by singing more and by raising hands more God has to respond more, you're stuck if He doesn't. Then you feel guilty and broken-hearted."*

Sadly, instead of that making them realise how wrong that approach is, many of these mega-church pastors are telling them it's because they're not doing enough. Like a vicious circle it goes on and on. A circle which is like a vortex, because it takes you down and down and down. So down, in fact, that it can lead you right away from the very Gospel itself

Whose party?

Whose party are you going to? Is it your one? You know, the party you get because you have changed your future? The party that's the celebration of how well you've done in this world?

Or are you going to the party you don't deserve to go to, but a party you simply cannot get away from? The doing and dying of Jesus Christ has had so great an impact on you that there's no way you can stay away! You see, you know He's got it all. Without Him you're convinced you would fall!

Now — who's really standing tall?

¹ The Rev. Geoff van Schie, Editor of 'Trowel & Sword' wrote extensively of this Conference, which he attended this year, in the September 2003 issue - 'Hillsong Conference 2003 - Understanding A remarkable Event' on pp.6-10. ('Trowel & Sword' is published for The Reformed Churches Publishing House, Willetton, Western Australia.)

² "You Can Change The Future: Living Beyond Today and Impacting the Generations Ahead," by Brian Houston, Maximised Leadership Inc., Sydney, Australia, 2000

³ Quote from RHEMA LIFE, the Church Newsletter of the Rhema Church, Perth, Western Australia, 1989

⁴ 'Geoff Bullock *changes his mind on worship*', pp. 12 in "The Briefing", April 29, 1999 ("The Briefing" is published by Matthias Media, P.O. Box 225, Kingsford, NSW, Australia)

⁵ 'Hillsong Conference - A Vocalist's Perspective', p11 in "Trowel & Sword", September 2003 op.cit.

⁶ Bullock, *ibid*

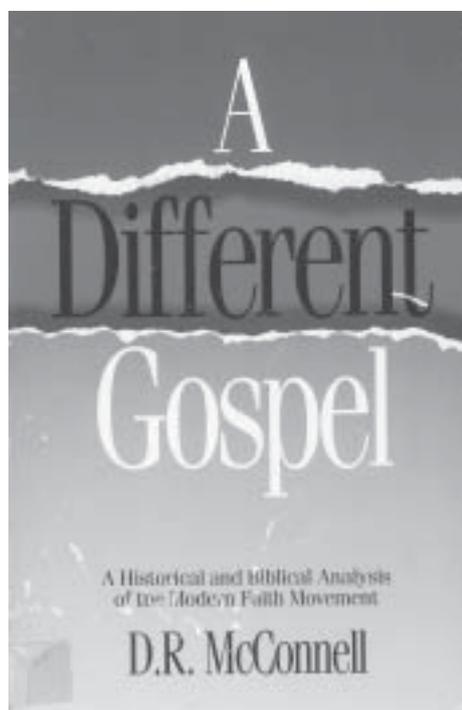
Church On Fire

*The Holy Spirit is here and His power is real
Anything can happen and it probably will
Something very good something very good is going on around here*

*There's a light that shine to make the dark disappear
A power at work but there's nothing to fear
Something very good something very good is going on around here*

*This is a church on fire
This is the Holy Spirit flame
We have a burning desire
To lift up Jesus' name
Let the fire burn in every heart
To light the way, defeat the dark
Let the flame of love burn higher
This is a church
This is a church on fire*

(c) Australia Hillsongs Lyrics



In his book, "A Different Gospel", D.R. McConnell has a deep and thorough analysis of the Modern Faith Movement, the very theology undergirding the 'health-and-wealth' theology openly advocated by Brian Houston, Brian Tamaki, Ray MacCauley, and the like.

A pentecostal himself, McConnell shows much research in exposing the roots of the latest and most heretical teaching to impact on pentecostal churches and, through their great influence, on the wider Christian community.

Here is one passage from his book which shows the 'new' teaching clearly, through its founding father, Kenneth Hagin, Sr: "It used to bother me," explains Hagin, 'when I'd see unsaved people getting results. Then it dawned on me what the sinners were doing: they were co-operating with the law of God - the law of faith.' Since the law of faith is impersonal, just like the law of gravity, it works regardless of who the person is or where he or she stands with Christ. To get these "results," the Faith teachers often recommend "little formulas" to follow for whatever a person needs from God. Fred Price, for instance, teaches that Rom.10:10 is a "formula" and that anybody 'could put anything in there [the formula] you want - healing, your needs met, new job, car, home, whatever you need.' Formulas such as these will, for anybody who uses them, place the resources of the world, heaven, and the universe at one's disposal."

Compare this with what the Rev. Terry Flanagan notes: "One only has to peruse Brian and Bobbie Hoston's books to see what they promote. Here are some brief

notes I've made about a few:

"You need more money" (pub. 1999) – A book that is built around one verse (Eccl. 10:19) which says "money is the answer to everything". I haven't had access to a copy but see a thorough critique of the book at http://member.ozemail.com.au/~rseaborn/houstons_problem.html.

"Get a Life - The Possibility for success and enjoyment in every area of life" (pub. 1999) Glowing endorsements by owners or C.E.O.s of large, some well known, multi million dollar businesses -none of whom express any commitment to Christ

Topics covered are "Discover your destiny - Fight negativity - Be a dreamer - Be an overcomer"

It quotes some handy sayings from Ancient Greek thinkers and contemporary secular thinkers with a sprinkling of verses from Ecclesiastes & Proverbs ...*but the gospel is definitely not central!*

"I'll Have What She's Having", by Bobbie Houston, is a nauseating piece of self congratulation about Bobbie, and her glamorous life, complete with glamour shots. And since God has told her she is his "little

princess" why not throw in the photo of her with a sword as "the warrior princess"? The gospel is definitely sidelined in this book.

There's not enough space in this letter to relate in full how the money mentality is then exercised, such as at CLC outreach services where money and giving were centre stage and prayer for the youth who attended was not for their conversion but that the Lord would lay it on their hearts to give the pocket money they'd brought along ... because the program the Church ran was not cheap.

"A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement", by D.R. McConnell, 1988, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts.

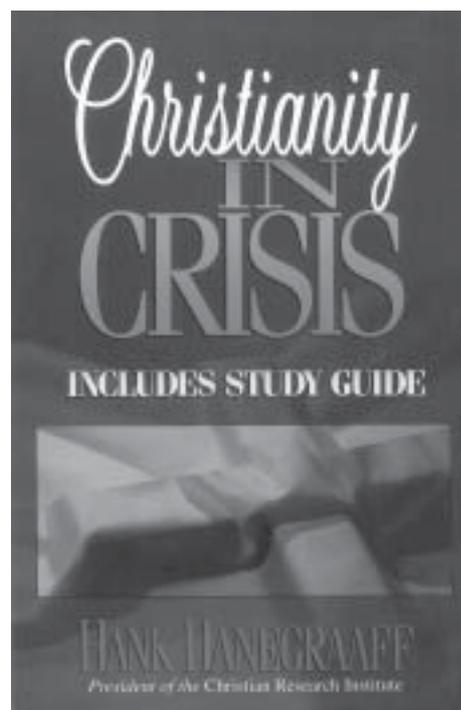
At the beginning of his book, "Christianity in Crisis", Hank Hanegraaf issues this strong warning, *Under the banner "Jesus is Lord," multitudes are being duped by a gospel of greed and are embracing doctrines straight from the metaphysical cults. While convinced that what they hear is the real thing, they are in fact turning on to nothing more than a cheap counterfeit. Eternal truths from the*

Word of God are being perverted into bad mythology - and all the while Christianity is hurtling at breakneck speed into a crisis of unparalleled proportions.

Is Hanegraaf being somewhat melodramatic? Many church leaders in America and around the world will tell you so. But then again they would - it's this very cultic teaching Hanegraaf exposes so clearly in this book which they so strongly promote!

Like D.R. McConnell, Hanegraaf himself is a pentecostal, and all the more concerned because of what he sees as the biblical roots of pentecostalism being so radically wiped out by the teaching of Kenneth Copeland, Morris Cerullo, Benny Hinn, Rodney Howard-Browne, and the late Kenneth E. Hagin, Sr.. Under sections entitled 'Turning the Truth into Mythology', 'Faith in Faith', 'Little Gods or Little Frauds', 'Atonement Atrocities', 'Wealth and Want', 'Sickness and Suffering', and 'Back to Basics', Hanegraaf brings out the key areas of heresy in the 'health-and-wealth' gospel.

This is the book to have have a reference book. With its 377 pages (more if you have the study guide included), it will serve as a valuable ally when you interact with those impacted by the devastating ministry of these television evangelists.



"Christianity in Crisis", by Hank Hanegraaf, is published by Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 1997.

Not satisfied with Jesus?

When faith is not alone

Bob Vincent

All this business is so deeply troubling. It is simply incomprehensible to me that anyone who would profess to hold to the truth of the Bible would deny such an important Biblical truth as salvation by faith alone. Over the past year or so, I have frequently lamented my bewilderment to my wife. Her response has always been something like, "It just shows they're not satisfied with Jesus."

"What do you mean?" I asked the first time she said it.

"People sometimes get to a point where they aren't happy simply in knowing Jesus. They're not content. They want something more. So they go after something else, because they're not satisfied with Jesus." Not given to flights of loquacity, that's what she said. So I sat and mulled her words and thought about the ecclesiastical world around me.

The sights that dazzle

The huge Southern Baptist Church that moved from downtown to a vacant spot

across the street a little over fifteen years ago just went through a thirteen-million-dollar expansion. They now have an upscale restaurant in their building. In their massive children's section is a huge McDonald's-type piece of playground equipment for children to climb on—it's over two storeys high and built inside is what looks like a child's version of Noah's Ark, complete with gigantic aquaria surrounding the entrances.

I suppose that I can't condemn having something like that if you can afford it, but it seems to be a parable for the programmes of that church: different styles of Sunday worship, surrounded by a plethora of self-help groups, Divorce Recovery being a really effective one.

We recently lost a family to them—at least they went over to another Evangelical church. The father told me, "They've got a better children's programme." Maybe they do, but I honestly believe that he was simply dazzled by that Ark—I know I was! Our church is dominated by cheaply-constructed, wood-frame buildings where we house a Christian school, K-12. The church across the street

is all brick.

The sounds that seduce

Across town from us is the largest church in Central Louisiana, maybe the largest in the state. Bill Clinton made two pilgrimages to it while he was President. It's a Jesus Only, Oneness, United Pentecostal Church, where you've got to be baptised by immersion in Jesus' name and speak in tongues in order to go to heaven. I understand that they have invested over a million dollars in their sound and light equipment.

How can we compete with all that? "How're you gonna keep 'em down on the farm after they've seen Par-ee?" All I have to offer people is Bible preaching about Jesus, unvarnished and plain, trying faithfully to stick to the biblical text—Jesus, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, truly God and truly man, in one Person forever—Jesus, Who lived a sinless life and died on the cross for our sins, once for all time, securing our salvation, taking away our sins and putting His own righteousness to our account—Jesus, our only hero, who



conquered death and hell, rose from the dead and now sits at God's right hand—Jesus, Whom we receive by faith alone as He's offered in the Gospel—Jesus, Who by His Holy Spirit gives us the desire and the power to live for Him.

People seem to want something more! They want the bigger barns; they want to feel good about themselves and their circumstances. They want to go beyond Jesus. Recently, I visited with the pastor of a really successful church in our presbytery who had well over ten thousand people attend at least one of their Easter weekend services. Talk about dazzling me!

The gospel plus

I told this pastor about a small, two-day pastors' retreat that I had set up: it was going to be free, the food cost taken care of by someone, held on a Mississippi plantation, courtesy of one of our members. The guest speaker was going to be each of us sharing from the Scriptures. We would have time to ourselves...time to walk in the woods, read our Bible and pray. Several days before, people started cancelling out, leaving just one other pastor. So I called him and told him we weren't going to do it.

I asked the guru of success about this, and he told me, "You had nothing value added." "Value added?" I asked. "Yes, you should have offered something extra, like chartering a large, deep sea fishing boat. Then nobody would have cancelled."

I wandered off, mulling his comments...if I've got to pay people to pray with me, I'd rather just pray with folks in my church and the handful of Black pastors that I meet with once a week. On a deep sea fishing trip, I'd be on my knees all right, barfing my guts out. I don't have anything more to offer than Jesus. People do come to Christ, and we've seen some marriages put back together and people get victory over alcohol and sexual

problems...depression and bitterness, too...but many of those people had already been baptised, made professions of faith and were regular church attendees, even though a few came from outside the visible church. So I've pretty much always been embarrassed when I see our statistics compared with other churches.

I'm grateful for a college and seminary education and the ability to read the Bible

in the original languages, but nobody is dazzled by my new insights and perspectives on anything. Other preachers don't flock to sit at my feet and drink from my fountain of knowledge or learn the secrets of my success. I don't preach with wall charts of Bible prophecy and current events in the Middle East. Nobody comes to me to learn how to become a millionaire. Everything that I ever say has been better said by somebody else; nothing's original. I'm not into liturgics, nor am I a movie critic; nobody invites me to lecture on the Civil War, and we don't have an annual ball to pine away after bygone days. We're not the local headquarters of the Christian Coalition. Our musicians are excellent, but we don't produce CDs of our services. I sometimes say something funny in a sermon, but nobody is slain by laughter hysteria, and people don't get gold dust in their hair, or cavities filled, during our prayer meetings. Yes, I think that I understand what my wife said. People are not satisfied with just Jesus.

Robert Benn Vincent is minister of Grace Presbyterian Church - rob@rbvincent.com

This was taken from the website of the Presbyterian Church of America

Sons of encouragement

Ian Hamilton

The church of Christ is full of unsung heroes. They do not, on the whole, possess the kind of spiritual gifts that get them noticed and give them a 'name'. They are, at least in my experience, rarely the most intellectually able or theologically articulate Christians in a congregation. And yet, they give their congregations a spiritual lustre that is nothing less than a divine benediction. Perhaps you are already wondering just who these people are; let me tell you - they are the spiritual seed of 'Barnabas', the prototypical 'Son of Encouragement' (Acts 4:36).

The grace of encouragement is a precious and much-to-be-prized grace. It is a grace that owes its origin, as all graces do, to the indwelling presence of the divine Encourager, the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the Holy Spirit is called the 'Paraclete', the One who comes alongside to minister the grace of Christ to his needy, wounded, limping servants. To be an encourager, is to be the Holy Spirit's chosen instrument to minister God's grace to his often-beleaguered saints. This is surely a grace to which all Christians should aspire. It may not, and probably will not, get you a

'name'; it will, however, make you a precious instrument for good to your fellow believers.

Why are 'sons [and daughters] of encouragement' so rare in our churches (granted that your church may be an exception)? A number of reasons spring to mind.

Encouragers Put the Needs of Others First

The first is, too many of us are taken up with ourselves, our needs, our concerns, our problems, our struggles. Encouragers, by definition, think more about the needs of others than about their own needs. Encouragers are not free of personal struggles and trials; but they put the needs of others before their own needs. They heed the apostolic command to 'look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others' (Phil. 2:4). In doing this, they display the selflessness of the Saviour.

Encouragers Minister the Consolation of Christ

A second reason is that too many of us are primed to search out weaknesses and flaws in other Christians, rather than being primed

to minister the consolation of Christ. Encouragers have Christ-like sight and a Christ-like heart. They are not blind to the sins and weaknesses in fellow Christians, but they recognize that 'love builds up'. This, no doubt, can become an excuse to neglect the grace of rebuke. But the rebukes that make their God-ordained mark on our lives are those rebukes administered by the church's encouragers - it is the wounds of friends that are most taken to heart. Too often in the church, those who are most eagle-eyed at pointing out what is wrong are the very people who should never do the pointing out. Our Lord Jesus memorably impressed this on us with his teaching on 'specks' and 'planks' (See Matt. 7:3-5).

Encouragers Minister Christ's Sympathy

Thirdly, encouragers appear to be few in the

church because we do not take as seriously as we should the present High-Priestly ministry of our Saviour. As he exercises his heavenly ministry from the throne of grace, our Lord Jesus 'sympathises with our weaknesses' (Heb. 4:15). He never forgets that we are dust. He knows perfectly our flaws and failures, but he deals with us compassionately and mercifully. There is a tender humanity about our majestic Saviour. Encouragers are often our great High Priest's means of ministering his divine sympathy to our bruised and lacerated souls.

You do not need a degree in theology to be an encourager. You do, however, need a Christ-like spirit. You do not need to be a gifted speaker or an extrovert personality to be an encourager. You do, however, need a humble spirit, that doesn't wait for others to do good to you before you do good to them. Indeed, the grace of encouragement only

grows in the fertile soil of humility. A kind and thoughtful word, a few lines on a note (**NOT an e-mail!**), an assurance of prayer, an unexpected visit, a smile, a thoughtful enquiry after some major event. None of these require you to have read Calvin, Owen, Edwards or Lloyd-Jones. They do require you to have drunk deeply of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. May it please the Lord to adorn our churches with encouragers. Our fellowships will be the sweeter and more wholesome.

The Rev. Ian Hamilton is the minister of the Cambridge Presbyterian Church, England

(Re-printed from the Banner of Truth Magazine)

World in focus

Contact with churches in Brazil

The Canadian Reformed Clerk of Synod 2001, Rev. G. Ph. Van Popta, informed the body that he had communicated Synod Neerlandia's decision regarding IRB [Reformed Church of Brazil] to the Brazilian churches. The committee interpreted Synod's decision "to offer a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship to the IRB" to mean: to enter into such a relationship with these churches, since Synod Neerlandia accepted their offer. Two printed copies of Acts Synod 2001 were sent to them.

The IRB (Igreja Reformadas Do Brasil) consists of two Regional synods. The Southern Regional Synod includes the churches of Colombo and Unai. The Northern Regional Synod includes the churches in North-eastern Brazil. In contrast to the churches of the Southern Regional Synod, these churches, which form the North-eastern Regional Synod, also come together as a classis.

The committee felt that in the initial stage of official relationship with IRB, it would be most beneficial to involve the Canadian churches conducting mission in Brazil.

It is reported by brother A. Nap who travelled to Brazil in September 2002 as a representative that IRB has enjoyed growth since 1976. The membership now stands at about 500. Synod decided to publish a final version of their Psalter (150 Psalms and 200 hymns) in four years. Reformed literature is being translated into Portuguese and works of theologians such as VanBruggen, Douma, Trimp, Doekes, and Velema/VanGenderen. + Canadian and American Reformed Churches, 26 Inverness Crescent, ST. Albert, AB T8N 513 raasman@canrc.org

Evangelical pastor assassinated

An evangelical Christian pastor on his way to a prayer service was assassinated near the town of San Juan Chamula in Mexico's troubled southern state of Chiapas. Mariano Daz Endez, 38, a minister of the indigenous Tzotzil Evangelical Church, was travelling near the village of Botatul on 24 October when heavily-armed assailants stopped his automobile. Witnesses said it appeared that Diaz got out of the car and attempted to evade his attackers before they shot him to death. Diaz is the second evangelical pastor to die in the space of two weeks.

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

Amyraldianism — is it modified Calvinism?

"Amyraldianism" by Ian Hamilton, minister of the Cambridge Presbyterian Church (EPCEW), addresses the teaching of Mose Amyraut (1596-1664) which is being actively promoted again. It is sometimes called "Four-Point Calvinism." This 28-page booklet challenges that heresy. It is the text and supporting footnotes of an address given at the EPCEW Leaders Conference in 2002 and is available for US\$2.00 per copy. Send check payable to EPCEW to the address below.

+ Clerk of Presbytery, Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales, 15 Key Ave., Worcester, WR4 0LT, UK

McGoldrick to assist new Hungarian University

Professor of Church History at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Taylors, South Carolina, Dr. James Edward McGoldrick,

has been appointed a Fellow of The King's University and Rakoczi Christian Research Institute in Hungary.

This new Reformed and evangelical institution is recruiting scholars from many nations to assist in creating an academically-superior university committed to Biblical principles and a Christian philosophy of higher education.

Dr. McGoldrick will serve as a reader and evaluator of theses and dissertations submitted to the university for advanced degrees in history, philosophy, and theology. + Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, PO Box 690, 418 East Main, St., Taylors, SC 29687 (864)322-2717

Evangelists beaten as Islam rises

On 23 October Yakup Cindilli, a Turkish convert to Christianity, was hospitalised after being beaten for distributing New Testaments in his hometown of Orhangazi in northwestern Turkey. Cindilli's condition is now critical, as he has slipped into a coma. Tufan Orhan, Cindilli's companion, was also beaten. Local police have identified and detained three suspects in the crime.

+ World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), PO Box 1839, Edmonds, WA 98020, (425) 778-5513

Crackdown on converts to Christianity

Egypt's state security police arrested and tortured a Christian couple of Muslim background, along with 11 other Egyptian citizens accused of forging Christian identity papers for former Muslims. Mohammed Ahmed Imam Kordy and his wife Sahar El-

Sayed Abdel Ghany were arrested in Alexandria on 18 Oct.

The wife was implicated in a complaint extorted under police torture that she had helped another Egyptian woman secure false identity papers. At least 10 more Christians have since been detained and subjected to torture.

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

They found the Bible!

The newsletter of the Magyar Reformed Church in Perth Amboy, New Jersey (HRCA), Rev. Dr. Attila Kocsis pastor, carried the following great news: "Almost two years ago the famous Hungarian Visoly Bible was stolen from the local church where it was exhibited. After a

long investigation, on 30 October 2003 the Hungarian police unit announced that the stolen Bible had been found in the attic of the home of one of the thieves. This Bible was translated by Gaspar Karoli in 1590 and was the first Bible to be translated in its entirety into Hungarian. There are only 15 original volumes all over the world. This Bible is considered to be priceless." The Bible was kept in a glass case in the Protestant church in the small village of Vizoly in northern Hungary, close to the border with Slovakia, when it was stolen.

+ Magyar Reformed Church, 493 Amboy Ave., Perth Amboy, NJ 08861 (732) 442-7799

Saudi bombing "aimed at" Lebanese Christians

A massive suicide bombing of a residential compound in Riyadh that killed 17 people and injured over 120 others recently was aimed at Lebanese Christians, a human rights watchdog revealed Friday, November 28.

The well-informed Barnabas Fund, which investigates the plight of Christians in mainly Muslim nations, said it has learned from a spokesman of the international terrorist network Al-Qaida that the bombers "were targeting mainly Americans and Christians."

"Months of surveillance had revealed (to Al-Qaida) that the inhabitants (of the al-Muhaya residential complex) were mainly Americans and Lebanese Christians. Both groups were deemed legitimate targets as enemies of Islam," the Barnabas Fund said.

"Of the seventeen people killed (among them five children), seven were Lebanese while among the 122 injured some 90 were Lebanese," the organisation discovered. www.assistnews.net

Jesus may not be welcome in America

George Barna finds a mere nine percent of self-affirming born-again Christians hold a Biblical worldview. The number falls to two percent in the denominations hemorrhaging members. The study, which contacted 2,033 people, projected a standard four percent compliance with a classical Biblical worldview. Even non-denominational independents only reached 13 percent congruence.

For the purposes of the research, a Biblical worldview was defined as believing that absolute moral truths exist; that such truth is defined by the Bible; and firm belief in six specific religious views. Those views were that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life; God is the all-powerful and all-knowing Creator of the universe and He still rules it today; salvation is a gift from God and cannot be earned; Satan is real; a Christian has a responsibility to share faith in Christ with other people; and the Bible is accurate in all of its teachings. + Barna Research Group, Ltd., 5528 Everglades St., Ventura, California 93003 (805) 658-8885

Vietnamese Christian leader arrested, extradited

On 29 November Vietnamese authorities extradited Ma Van Bay from Binh Phuoc province in the Central Highlands to his former home in Ha Giang province on the Chinese border. Christians who know the brutality of government authorities in Ha Giang fear Bay, a key Hmong Christian leader arrested on 17 November, will face serious abuse. A Christian since the early 1990s, Bay emerged as a leader of the rapidly growing Christian community in his home province. In 1997, authorities accused him of "stealing money from the citizens for personal gain" and illegally propagating the Christian religion. Badly beaten and facing up to 12 years in prison, Bay escaped custody and received help from Christians of another minority group in the Central Highlands. On 1 July police in Ha Giang beat to death another Hmong Christian, Vang Seo Giao, and disposed of his body in a river. A journalist in Hanoi who questioned Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the murder was informed that Giao had "drowned crossing a stream while drunk."

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

International Anglican churches expel Episcopal Church (USA)

Leaders of America's wealthy Episcopal Church (USA) have grown accustomed to getting their way. No one took action when New Jersey bishop Spong repudiated every major doctrine of historic Anglicanism. The international Anglican community also accepted women's ordination to the priesthood. Observers expected similar acquiescence to homosexual ordination. Initial reports from an international meeting to deal with American revisionism indicated one more round of silent acceptance.

This time however, reports of complacency were premature. From Nigeria and Uganda to Singapore, the largest Anglican communities have broken fellowship with the Americans declaring America to be open mission territory and offering assistance to Americans interested in staying with the international family rather than the national hierarchy. American bishops unwilling to endorse homosexual bishops now have a viable alternative to the organisation directed by Presiding Bishop Frank T. Griswold.

The Orthodox churches have similarly placed all relations with the Americans on hold and the largest of them, the Russian Orthodox Church, even questioned continued participation in the World Council of Churches if the Americans remain members. Roman Catholics demanded and obtained the resignation of Griswold from the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission, which has been negotiating relations between Canterbury and Rome.

*Rejoice in the Lord always.
I will say it again: Rejoice! Phil 4:4*

*With grateful hearts and with real joy
we are happy to announce the*

50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

*of our parents, grand parents and
great grand parents*

Nic & Atie OOSTERBAAN



**Married in Wellington
18 January 1954**

Ingrid (deceased) & Stan
Barry, Shane, Daniel + Gina
Cole, Savana

Nick & Claire
Nikki, Jason

Ed & Joke
Jennifer, Kim

Gary & Brenda
Edward, Carena, Anton, Benson

Diane & Jurgen
Mitchel, Maxime

4 Volga Street, Island Bay, Wellington

What makes homosexual ordination different from the ordination of women in a community which confessionally restricts ordination to men?

Knowledgeable observers trace the answer to the Internet. Until recently, outsiders depended on officially-controlled information streams. This time, the 80,000 circulation *Virtuosity Digest* does daily documentation of

trends in imperial fashion. America's leftwing leadership cannot do anything in private.

Commercial media indicated that the recent English peace convention ended with the leader of the largest Anglican community walking out and returning to Africa. *Virtuosity Digest* stated that Archbishop Akinola left under guard after death threats.

Anyone who wants to switch from the *New*

York Times to *Virtuosity Digest* will find more entertaining material, but will still have the two-hour daily reading slot amply filled with text. This time, however, the paper is free and it comes neatly packaged on the Internet.

Learn more at <http://www.virtuosityonline.org/digest.html>
+ Dr. Edwin P. Elliott, Editor *Presbyterians-Week*

Breakthrough

The lesson in life

Patricia van Laar

God has His own wonderful way of dealing with us as individuals. Each of us has special needs of our own, 'hang-ups' of which perhaps even our nearest and dearest have no idea. My own story in itself is of no particular significance or value, except that under God, it may help some with their own problems to face. It is told for the honour of God, and with gratitude to Him for what He has accomplished in my life, rather than a 'baring of my soul' for misplaced sympathy! So with this apology for a personal testimony, I tell of incidents from nearly fifty and sixty years ago.

Supposedly writing a letter, I perched on my straw palliasso, gazing over rows of camp beds set up as a temporary dormitory in a long, one-roomed building in the grounds of a Canterbury rural high school. I was at a 'Crusader Camp' (as the Secondary School Christian Fellowship was then called). Sunshine streamed through an unglazed window running along the length of the room, warming my body after a crisp morning run to the main building for ablutions and breakfast. But nothing, it seemed, could warm my coldness of spirit.

In reality, I was having a ding-dong argument. To win this would make me; to lose it would break me. The argument was between my two selves, the 'am' and the 'would be'. I was just fifteen years old.

When it began

It had all started eight years earlier. Shortly before my youngest uncle's wedding, my two front top teeth fell out. As flower girl, I was told I'd have to keep my mouth closed, especially for the all-important photographs. The wedding day came, rain poured down; shadow of tears to come? Little did I guess, keeping my mouth closed was to become my life.

As soon as the new teeth poked through the gums my Dad said, "There's something wrong with those teeth." Off to Jack Jones

the dentist, who confirmed that indeed something was wrong. The two teeth had no enamel. Three months of daily trips into town by tram followed, while Mr. Jones painted on a protective coating against wind and cold, both of which made the teeth ache.

What I did not foresee was the years of social effect my teeth would have. Unable to bite with them meant embarrassing crumbs, crumbs, crumbs; but worse, their colour was a dull tan. Children, thoughtless but not deliberately cruel, always asked, "What's wrong with your teeth?" Reply patiently and explain, over and over again. (They had no idea of the structure of a tooth.) Answers seemingly accepted, if not quite understood.

Yet - rejection! "Why am I so unpopular?" If teams were needed, I was the last chosen. Birthday parties came and went without an invitation. My opinions were nothing. I pondered the problem, sometimes crying myself to sleep. Or I would take my revenge

lying awake in bed, by imagining into being a large hotel in the fields over the road, where everyone nice to me was my guest, and the horrid ones were all cooks, bottle-washers, cleaners and chambermaids!

Puzzling everything over, I concluded people did not like something in my *personality*, an assumption carried into my teen years. Incredibly the real reason never occurred to me, even when a girl told me I stank because my teeth were rotten. I knew I did not stink; I knew my teeth were not rotten, but argue? I shrivelled up and closed my mouth. That is how it was.

Boys were no worry. In the 1930s, schoolboys ignored girls (on the surface anyway!) One at Intermediate would talk to me if no one else was around, and make me laugh. The boys in my street (I was the only girl), familiar with my defect, ignored it, welcoming a 'Minnehaha' when playing cowboys and Indians, especially as I could hit a broom handle with home-made bow and arrow as well as any of them. Adults, perhaps, never noticed - I was adept at talking with my mouth closed. Visitors fussed over my attractive young brother, who did not slink away from them, but stayed to chat. Yes, something in my *nature* was displeasing.

When I was twelve, despite World War II, a German doctor employed by the Health Department came to the intermediate school to check pupils' general health. What qualifications she had is beyond my knowledge, but her competence with teeth was questionable! Lining us up she tested sight and hearing, and looked into our mouths. My turn.

I cringed when she shouted in front of everyone, even the class teacher, "What dreadful 'tees'. You should see a dentist at *vunce*." I, who since I was seven had lived at the dentist! It never occurred to me that a *doctor* would not recognise that here was not neglect, but a genetic, medical problem. The teacher looked up from his work and



stared at me but said nothing. I flushed and said nothing.

Mother, furious when she heard, biked to school to protest, but by then the doctor had already gone. I was disappointed she escaped a 'telling off'. A year or two later came a rumour that she had been put into a concentration camp. My revengeful little heart fervently hoped so.

Jack Jones went to war. My new dentist, Dr Every, had studied the latest technology in the USA.

He planned to crown my teeth with a new material (plastic) when my mouth had fully developed. Meantime, just after I began secondary school, he gave them a white front covering; still faulty, but the horrible tan was gone. I had succeeded during my first few weeks at the new school in keeping my mouth closed, so girls I met there for the first time had not noticed anything. But my social fear of girls remained.

At the camp

Two years later I sat on my palliasse at the camp. A circle of girls was standing at the far end of our makeshift dormitory. Watching the group talking to each other, I felt a longing to share. Back and forth went the silent argument:

"Get up, join them."

"Don't be silly. They won't want me."

"Of course they will. They won't mind!"

"Yes they will. Girls don't like me."

"How have these girls treated you? Christian girls? At a Christian camp? Go and join them."

"I can't...and yet...how I'd love to..."

"Well, go and see what happens."

So I did. It was the simplest thing I have ever done; the bravest thing I have ever done. I stood up and walked the length of that room to join those girls.

What did they do? Moved back a little to make room for me. No one stared, no one glared, no one stopped talking. They *just stepped back a little, to make room for me!*

That small incident was the turning point in my life. Oh, yes, I still had a long way to go, battles to win, but it marked the start; a new confidence, the healing of mind and spirit, the understanding that being accepted in the Lord, I was also accepted by His people, and the dawn of finding acceptance by the world in general.

So it proved. Gradually I gained the confidence to develop leadership qualities. I went to Teachers' College, taught Sunday School, began a youth club, and by the time I was 21, had organised and run a couple of small youth camps. Later, special training for church service led to my conducting children's and occasionally adult choirs, organising charity concerts, training Sunday School teachers, running larger camps, home visiting and addressing meetings of sometimes several hundred people. All this from a person too shy, as my parents thought, to go to Teacher's College!

Thank God for the blessing of Christian camps. Praise Him for the love of fellow Christians. Thank Him for the worth He places on us. I praise and thank Him for His

unfailing love. For John 3:16. For the lessons I learnt from the whole experience. For how He took me, and made me His.

And I thank and praise God for the courage He gave me to take the first step. A breakthrough of the wall I had been building around myself. A tremendous breakthrough.

What He did for me, He can do for you in your own particular need. All Honour and Glory to His Name.

A note for parents

My plea to parents whose child has any physical problem that would cause difficulties with fellow pupils is to make sure every teacher knows of the problem and its cause, and ask that it be explained to the class. In my case, it would have been the opportunity for a splendid lesson on the structure and care of teeth. Such an action would have helped save me much anguish.

But I do not blame my splendid parents at all. They were fantastic; supportive and sacrificial. Times were hard and they could not really afford the dentist fees. Teachers were not as approachable in those days as now, and anyway, it would not have occurred to them to do so; I had never told them what was happening at school. I don't think they knew I sometimes cried myself to sleep, and certainly not that I otherwise avenged myself by lying awake, imagining the hotel.

Thank God for my parents, who were determined if possible to save my teeth. I still have them (crowned) today.

Mission in focus

Growing the church in Karamoja

The following article was published by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the United States, reporting on the progress of their work in the South Karamoja region, Uganda. It is a report by missionary David Okken, describing the Lord's blessing on the work, which was specially marked on September 13, 2003....

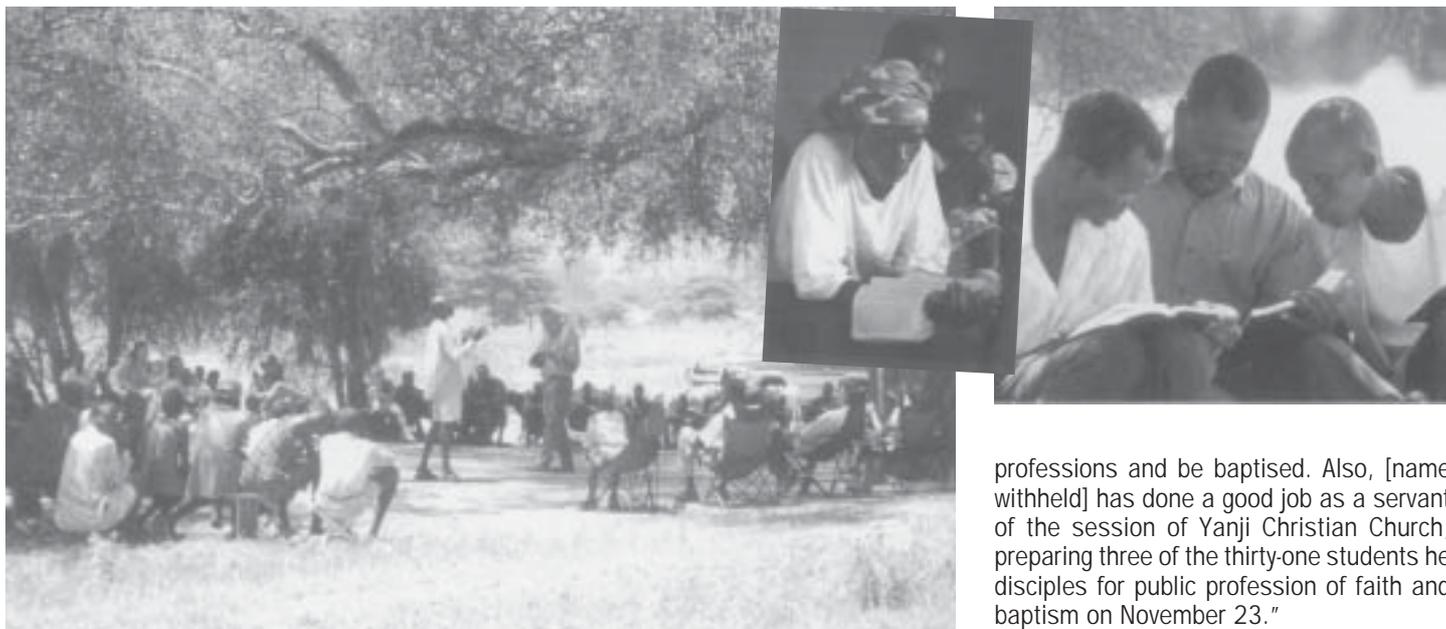
The Scriptures tell us that the angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner who repents. In Nakaale, the saints were rejoicing with them this past Lord's Day. It was our first baptismal service and reception of new members. What a blessing it was to see the coming to fruition of that for which we have laboured so many months!

Many stood up and made profession of their faith in Jesus. Among them was Lomogin Felix, a man who had previously

led a life of stealing and killing as a cattle rustler. But many months ago, we saw the Lord begin to change him as Pastor Tony Curto began preaching the word in Nakaale. On this Lord's Day, Felix stood up and professed his faith in Jesus and promised, in dependence upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, to seek to live for His honour and glory. With tears in his eyes, Pastor Tony had the privilege of baptising Felix.

The Mission was rejoicing that the Lord had been pleased to use us, such unprofitable servants, in the lives of so many in Karamojong. One of the most clear professions of faith came from Lokwii Zakary, a young student whom nurse Kristie Scott had spent hours helping to learn and memorise the children's catechism. What a privilege it was for me personally to baptise him.





The days and weeks leading up to the event were quite exhausting, as I was spending so much time meeting the many who had expressed interest in church membership. It took a lot of work not only to discern credible professions of faith, but also to provide instruction about what was involved in church membership. Of course, in a polygamous culture there were many complicated situations to sort through. I was thankful to have a plurality of elders involved in the process before receiving any into membership.

In the end, we had assembled quite a team of pastors to participate in the service. It was a joy to see Bugandan pastors baptising Karamojong believers, a testimony of the way the Gospel breaks down tribal rivalries and unites men into one body under one Head, the Lord Jesus. By the end of the day, fifty-one individuals had made profession of faith and been received as members of the church: forty-six of those were baptised, nineteen adults and twenty-seven children. We are thankful for each soul, which the Lord has been pleased to bring unto Himself and into our fold. Please pray that this congregation will grow strong in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We give thanks not only for a good spiritual harvest, but also for the recent good rains that have brought a bountiful harvest of maize, sorghum, sunflower, g-nuts, etc. There is plenty of food these days. Our storehouse is filling up as we continue to harvest our own fields.

The negative effect of much rain, however, is that it brings out the mosquitoes. There has been much malaria among the members of our Mission and the general community. The medical clinic has seen record numbers this season. We had already been seeing about as many patients as we could handle.

Things became even more difficult when all the other Health Units in the district ran out of medicine, so that all the patients in the larger area began coming to Nakaale. On one day this week, the clinic saw 115 patients by noontime. Pray for the many sick and for Dr. Prawius and the staff as they labour to keep up with all of this.

We, the Okken family in particular, are doing well. The Lord has been gracious to protect little Caleb from malaria. Sunshine has had it once, and I have had it twice this season. Yet the Lord has been gracious to sustain us through this as well.

Thank you so much for your many prayers and support. The Lord has truly done great things, and we praise His name.

MIF prayer notes

Pray for the **Prawis** family who have been serving with the OPC in **Uganda**. After years of watching their twelve-year-old daughter, Sarah, struggle with recurring bouts of malaria, despite numerous unsuccessful trials of antimalarial medications, the family has decided to return to the States to get her out of the malaria zone. Pray for God's comfort for the family as they make this difficult decision, and also for the work in Karamojong which suffers a great setback with the loss of Dr Prawius from the medical clinic (see article above).

Give praise for the Lord's working through the ministry of OPC missionaries in **China**. **Sam Folta** reports: "We rejoice in much good news coming out of Yanji, China! First, [name withheld] reports that two college girls she has been leading through an exploratory study of the Bible have repented and professed faith in Jesus Christ. Please pray for them now as they prepare to make public

professions and be baptised. Also, [name withheld] has done a good job as a servant of the session of Yanji Christian Church, preparing three of the thirty-one students he disciples for public profession of faith and baptism on November 23."

Pray for **Kevin and Machi Rietveld**, serving in the **Solomon Islands** with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. Kevin reports that Jack and Trudy Visser, from Queensland, have been appointed to replace the De Hoog family on the mission field. They will be arriving, Lord willing, this month. Please pray for a good transition into the work, and the safe arrival of their personal goods which have been shipped to the island. Also, pray for Jack as he continues with a Christian School Library project that was started by Frank late last year. Pray for Machi Rietveld as she deals with the busy requests for school sponsorship support in the beginning of the year.

Rev Stephen and Dorinda 't Hart have recently returned to **Papua New Guinea** from a 6-week break in Australia to spend time with family. Please pray for them as they settle into the work again. Shortly before the publication deadline for this issue, we learned that Rev 't Hart had his study in Ekoro broken into, and his computer and a lot of equipment stolen. This was a grave setback, and many ministry resources were lost. While it happened several months ago (October), I'm sure he's still feeling the loss; please pray for the Lord's protection of his equipment and also that of Hagoorts.

Wally and Jeannette Hagoort from Hukanui congregation arrived in **Papua New Guinea** a few weeks ago. They have just started the Pacific Orientation Course (POC), which lasts three months and is extremely intensive. Please pray for them, as they get used to the hot climate, and as they learn about the culture and language of PNG. Pray that the Lord would bless their language acquisition and help them to quickly learn to communicate proficiently. Pray also for their health and endurance! As part of the POC,

Wally and Jeannette and have to undertake up to three day hikes, in wet, very slippery and steep terrain.

Janice Reid is still busy in **Cambodia** with the development of training materials for missionary radio stations. At time of writing, Janice and her colleague, Jean-luc Lebrun, are planning a first test of their introductory training course to be held in early February. Please pray that these materials would help participants learn key radio skills to help them in their work for the harvest. Pray also for Janice and Jean-luc as they evaluate the results of the training, and modify the training materials as needed, to make them even more effective.

RCNZ Food Aid to Malawi

The September 2003 F in F issue showed two photos capturing aspects of the food crisis effort to Malawi. One was of a banner held by two indigenous workers outside a distribution centre carrying a message of

appreciation to aid-donors in the form of a prayer. The other was of a grateful and smiling (not to say relieved) woman leaving such a centre with a sack of grain.

Such photos capture something of the material and the mechanics of relief work. It is not so easy to catch the inner emotions and responses of the heart to such charitable work. In fact we may never know until eternity the way God has employed such actions. Do we need to know? Do we know the affect of sowing the seed of the Gospel in other contexts? Well often, if not mostly, we do not. It is the responsibility of the Church of Jesus Christ to act in the Name of Jesus and for His honour, to "cast her bread upon the waters" committing the outcome prayerfully to our heavenly Father.

As this is written, a report is just to hand from the agency through which NDC directed our RCNZ aid to the Church in Malawi, the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC). The report is mostly about the **where**, the **to whom**, and the **how**.

The serious 2002/03 food crisis affecting countries in Southern Africa was caused by several factors. For Malawi, one was the

exceptional regional drought. But others were unaffordable agricultural supplies (seed and fertilizer), an empty strategic grain reserve, and increasing poverty. The disaster was further exacerbated by the role of HIV and Aids reducing the labour pool for agriculture and placing a strain on limited household/farmlet resources.

We assisted three connected projects through our gifts. The beneficiaries in the regions selected were poor farmer households who had no other income source than their own crop production. Of them the most vulnerable were selected for supply, i.e. families with young weaned children who could not get enough to eat, pregnant or breast-feeding women, the chronically ill, those suffering from HIV/AIDS, the elderly and the handicapped. Two orphanages received food, the Mchinji Orphanage and the House of Hope, where 408 orphans were served.

One project distributed 1,000 MT (metric tons) of food to 3854 households plus the children in the two orphanages. Another used 1,000 MT of food grain (grain that may have been mixed with GMO product, which, while in transit, was rejected by Zambia) to supply 2990 households for six months. A third project provided seed and planting stock for 5,930 families, families already assisted with food, to enable planting for the 2003/04 harvest season.

We thank the CRWRC for allowing us to join them in this programme, but above all we thank our Heavenly Father for the resources entrusted to us and the opportunity to reflect His graciousness in this way, with the prayer that He may use this relief work to change attitudes and hearts and turn them to look upon His glorious Son. Please continue to pray that the affect of such Christian relief may make a lasting impact for eternity.



Country profile: Vietnam

Many westerners know Vietnam as the war the Americans lost when they intervened in the southern part of the country during the height of the Cold War, to stop the spread of communism from the north. Vietnam has changed a lot from those days, and is a much more open country with a thriving market economy, and many popular tourist spots. But Vietnam is still communist. It still jams missionary radio broadcasts—it still goes to extremes to oppress those who seek to worship the Lord of Truth.

There are a number of different religions in Vietnam, with Buddhism claiming only 54% of the population as adherents. Twenty-one percent claim to be non-religious; just over 8% are Christian (from several different denominations). With well over 3 million members, the Roman Catholic church has over six times more adherents than the next largest denominational grouping.



Pray for Vietnam:

1. *Operation World* reported in 2001, that a large-scale and sustained turning to God is taking place, in both registered and unregistered

- churches, and especially among the mountain tribal peoples of central and southern Vietnam. Praise the Lord of the harvest for this great blessing, and pray for strength, perseverance and growth for these brothers and sisters in Christ
2. Vietnam has one of the world's highest abortion rates: two abortions for every live birth. Pray that the ideological and moral darkness over this nation might be banished by the light of the Gospel
3. Vietnam remains one of the worst persecutors of Christians (especially tribal believers). Pray for:
 - a. Those in prison for their faith
 - b. Registered churches, to stand strong in the face of unrelenting government pressure. Meetings are only permitted in the few remaining recognised church buildings—the majority have been closed or destroyed
 - c. Unregistered churches, which are harassed by the police, have their meetings frequently broken up and leaders arrested
 - d. Mountain tribes in the area near the borders between Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia: Several of these have seen people-group movements as whole communities come to Christ. Severe persecution is often the result. Pray for these groups, for strength in their faith, and growth in truth, as some are beset by false teachings. Many people from these tribes have no Christian leaders, and nothing but missionary radio broadcasts from FEBC to guide them in their spiritual growth.
4. Vietnamese people in other countries, that they would come in contact with the Gospel message, and take it back to their homeland
5. Unreached groups within Vietnam, including the Muslim Cham and the Buddhist Khmer of the Mekong Delta; where only a handful have believed
6. The spread of the Scriptures. The Bible was officially printed inside Vietnam for the first time, in 1995. Many ethnic minorities do not have the Bible in their language and at least 45 languages are in need of translation projects
7. Missionary radio broadcasts have had a remarkable effect. FEBC broadcasts 26 hours/week in Vietnamese, and has twice/weekly broadcasts in 21 other tribal languages. Trans World Radio (TWR) adds a further 10 hours/week in Vietnamese.

Information from *Operation World* CD-ROM, Copyright ©2001 Patrick Johnstone. Used with permission.

Surfing the Net

The upside & downside of the Internet

J. Visscher

The title of this editorial may puzzle some of our readers — however, I am sure that many of you will recognize it immediately. Specifically, it has to do with the Internet. More generally, it also has to do with the world of computers and modern communication. When a person has a computer and that computer is connected by either telephone line or satellite hook-up to the world-wide web, then that person can

begin to surf or to ride on electronic waves. He or she has the means at their disposal to consult with people around the globe.

Instant communication

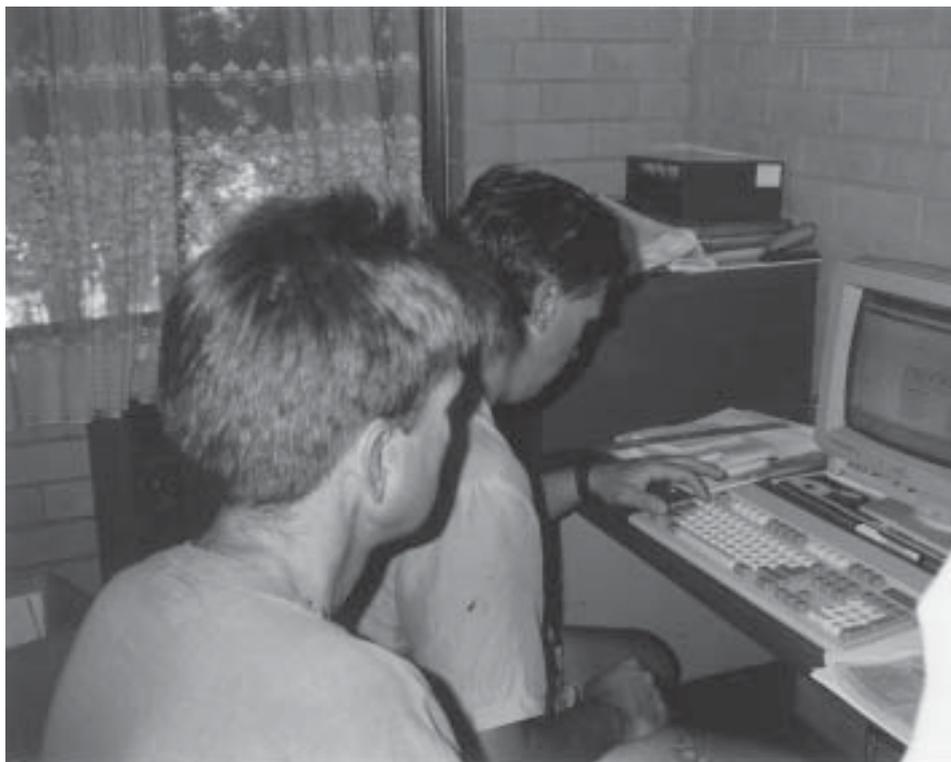
For example, if today you do not feel like taking out pen and paper to write a letter to a distant relative or friend, mailing it at a certain cost and waiting days or weeks to get a reply, you have an alternative. You can sit behind your computer, type a letter on the keyboard in front of you, hit a button and

in an instant it is sent and received on the other side of the world.

It may be that in addition to writing a letter, you want to send some pictures. No problem! Take out your digital camera, snap your pictures, download them electronically to your computer and with a few clicks of your mouse, they are on their way.

Keeping up contact

Or perhaps you have friends or relatives living in different parts of the world and you want



to keep up contact with all of them; but time is lacking and the postage costs are prohibitive. This too is a minor matter. Write your letter on the computer, add your pictures and then send it to as many people as you want all at once. It's just that easy.

Searching everywhere

Another scenario comes to mind. You have to do research on a certain subject. Perhaps it has to do with a school assignment or a work project. Again, you power up your computer, connect it to the web, go to one of its many search engines — Google, Altavista, Yahoo or the like — type in your subject and with blazing speed all kinds of sources are identified and many can be accessed.

What this brief introduction shows you is that computers plus the Internet open up all sorts of wonderful opportunities. Never before has so much information been at the beck and call of so many, so cheaply and so quickly.

The downside

Nevertheless, along with the good there is also the bad. Indeed, as is the case with almost every human invention, it has the ability to be used either for good or evil. The telephone was invented and while it allowed families to keep in close contact, it also allowed gossip to spread like wildfire. The radio came along and people were exposed to both religious and secular broadcasting. Television hit the market and human eyes took in both pictures of great beauty and images of grotesque violence. So often there

seem to be these two sides to whatever man invents.

The same also goes for the Internet. I have just mentioned a few of the positives, but I would derelict in my duties if I did not also mention some of the negatives. What are they?

Wasting time

Now, some will say that the fact that certain people spend a lot of time surfing the net is nothing to worry about. It is a novelty that will soon wear off. And no doubt in many cases it does. For some people, however, the hobby becomes an addiction. They seem to spend a lot of their free time glued to keyboard and screen.

Most of you are familiar with the expression "golf widow." It describes a wife who is married but who rarely sees her husband because he is out on the links every chance he gets. In line with this we now have another kind of widow: a "computer widow." Hubby is so wrapped up in this electronic marvel that she is forced to take a backseat to a thing of metal and wires.

Should you ask what hubby or teenage son or daughter is doing on the net, then different answers are forthcoming. Father John may well be part of a discussion group where the debates are raging fast and furious. Son Bill may be playing strategy games with his friends and seeing who can win the battle or the war that is being fought. Daughter Betty may be on one or other chat line telling her friends about the latest flame in her life.

Oh, and lest we think that Mother Alice is

not involved in any of this, we should think again. I happen to be a "lurker," which is a term used to describe someone who is a member of one or more discussion groups on the web, reads what comes along but rarely interacts. What strikes me when I am lurking, and so often deleting too, is that some women are no less adept than men when it comes to using the net as a major time consumer.

All in all, it begs the question: what are people doing with their time? Even more, it makes one wonder whether Christians who live their lives on the net are living as they should. Surely, it behooves all of us as believers to step back occasionally and to ask ourselves what we are doing with the gift of time that God has so graciously given to us?

Bad manners

Another problem that is connected with the net is an increase in bad manners. What do I mean? I am thinking of the fact that some people use the net to air their complaints recklessly. Take the case of the church member who disagrees with Sunday's sermon. In the past if he or she might felt compelled to approach the offending pastor, they would do so politely and during the week. Now what seems to happen all too often is that people come home from church in a huff, get behind their computers, pound out a complaint and fire it off right away. It is so much easier to vent your frustrations at a metal box than to deal with a human face.

Or what about apologies? Common courtesy demands that when you wrong someone you go to them and make your excuses. Modern modems, however, allow you to send a lame message via computer in a very detached and impersonal manner. Hence my advice to all you net users is: mind your manners! Just because you have this new invention at your disposal does not give you the right to blaze away with abandon and to retract with glibness. Loving your neighbour has electronic implications too.

Violence

Wasting time and poor manners, however, are not the only downsides of the net. There is also the issue of violence. This often rears its ugly head in the area of computer games. Many of these games are violent, and some are violent to the extreme. Males, and young males in particular, activate certain games and then get sadistic satisfaction from the ever increasing number of people they can kill on the screen.

Of course I realize that these are not real kills—nevertheless, one has to ask some serious questions about the spiritual level of Christians who get their thrills out of zapping imaginary people. Does it not desensitize them to real violence? Is it not,

in spirit at least, a violation of the sixth commandment and the call to love our neighbour?

Pornography

Still, of all of these misuses, the most serious one remains to be mentioned — pornography. You may be employing the net in a perfectly innocent and legitimate way and suddenly a message pops up on your screen inviting you to visit a sexually explicit site. In a moment of weakness, you may surf where no one should really surf at all and end up in a world of lust, perversion, cruelty and degradation. So easily this invention that has such great uses can

become an instrument of the devil.

As a result, we all need to be on our guard. If someone in your household spends a lot of time on the computer they must agree to be answerable to the other members of the household for what they are doing on it. If there is a computer with Internet access in your home and it is behind closed doors, get it out into the open. If a family member is monopolising it, set reasonable time limits. From time to time check the history window to see which sites family members are visiting. In short, hold one another accountable.

In summary, the best standard when it comes to the proper use of this medium, as

well as to so many other things in life, is what we find in Philippians 4:8, 9. Listen: *“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”*

The Rev. J. Visscher is a minister in the Canadian Reformed Churches.

This article originally appeared in ‘Clarion’, their denominational magazine.

Focus on home

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Andrew Reinders

Avondale

We congratulate the Alexander family. Mrs Saskia gave birth, albeit a little early, to a healthy son, Jeremiah Thomas. God’s wonderful blessings continue to be experienced by us.

Bishopdale

A Men’s Breakfast will be held from 7.30 – 9 am on Saturday 8th of November at the Reformed Church of Bishopdale. Our guest speaker will be from the Maxim Institute speaking about current trends relating to the family and society in New Zealand and a Christian response to these. Cost \$5. Invite your friends and workmates. Please contact Peter Heeringa or Murray Dalley if you are planning to come.

Wedding: The wedding of Gideon van Schalkwyk and Tineke van Ameyde will take place at 1 pm on Friday 14th of November in the Reformed Church of Bishopdale. All are welcome to this joyful occasion.

Two baby girls were born to church families this last week: Charlotte Emma to Ronald and Linde Marie Amersfoort last Sunday evening and Hannah Elizabeth to Tim and Leanne Kuipers on Tuesday morning. We give thanks to God for the safe arrival of these

children. The baptism of Charlotte will take place next Sunday morning.

This morning we have the privilege of witnessing the baptism of Charlotte Emma Amersfoort. We rejoice with Ronald and Linde Marie and their wider families in this gift of another daughter and grand-daughter and in

this sign and seal of her place as a covenant child in the church.

Bucklands Beach

We offer warm congratulations to Ruud and Betsie Storm as they celebrate 50 years of marriage. On 14 November 1953 the Rev Deenick married them in a Service of the

The 2003 RTC Biblical Preaching Workshop (2&3 October)

“Preaching Christ from Old Testament Stories”
(The Gospel in the Book of Judges)

CD(MP3) of Proceedings
(CD(MP3) captures the entire proceedings on one CD !!
MP3 is compatible with most PCs, and modern DVDs but not compatible with ordinary CD players)

ORDER FORM Price: \$25 includes GST & Postage.

Please supply

| | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|---------|
|2003 CDs @ \$25 each | = | | \$..... |
|2002 CDs @ \$25 each | = | | \$..... |
| TOTAL | | = | \$..... |

Name.....
Address.....
.....Ph.....

SEND ORDER FORM PLUS CHEQUE, OR ENDORSE CARD DETAILS

No., exp date:.....
Signature.....
Name on Card:.....

PREACHINGWORKSHOPSCDADNLIFE
To RTC, 125 Pigdons Rd, Waurin Ponds, Vic 3216

Reformed Church of Auckland in Mt Eden. May the Lord give you many more years of blessing together.

Christchurch

We give thanks for the safe birth of Isaac Matthias Klazinga, born this past Friday morning. Mother and son are doing well recovering at Burwood hospital. Please pray for Julie and myself, for Isaac, and for all our children, that we may have wisdom in raising these precious gifts in the fear of the Lord, and that they may serve their faithful Father in Heaven and know of His work and His grace in their lives.

Dear brothers and sisters, we thank you for everything; in particular for your concern and prayers after a cancer was removed from my eyelid and it had to be reconstructed. Especially the many visits of our minister, prayers and talks for which we are very thankful. As we are very shortly moving to Hamilton, we are aware of the many ties we have with this congregation of which we have been a part for so many years — we thank you all. We leave with many fond memories of our time with you all and pray for the Lords blessing on you for the many years to come and till we meet again. In Christ, Chris and Nelly Dorlas.

Dunedin

Hearty congratulations to Ron and Tani Newton with the safe arrival of Nathanael George Herbert Newton on Friday 24 October by caesarean. Mother and child are doing well, thanks be to God.

Handel's Messiah. The Ladies' Fellowship is organising bookings for the performance of Handel's Messiah at the Town Hall on Tuesday 9 December at 7:30 pm. If anyone in the congregation, or beyond, would like to join us please speak to Liz Jurgens as soon as possible. Bulk booking price per ticket is \$18.00. Please give Liz the money for the tickets when booking. The sooner we book, the better our seats will be.

Hastings

Church Camp Waitangi Weekend Interested? We are contemplating a church camp on Waitangi weekend and need to know if people are interested so that we can confirm our booking. Please see notice in your

pigeonhole for further details. R.S.V.P by TODAY. - *Social Committee.*

Masterton

Pastoral Notes: Andre and Annelies de Leeuw were blessed with a healthy son, Janneil, early on Thursday morning. We give thanks to the Lord for blessing Andre and Annelies and our congregation with another covenant child.

Palmerston North

We rejoice in announcing we have been blessed by the safe birth of Benjamin Andrew Theodore de Klerk at 1.55PM last Tuesday by caesarean section - weighing in at 4.25kg (9lb 5oz). Lucy and Ben are doing well. *Theo and Lucy*

Church Camp 2004. The Church camp will now be held over Wellington Anniversary weekend Friday 16th until Monday 19th January at Foxton Beach Bible Camp. Please note these dates if you intend to come along. Information forms should be out by December which will give further details of topics, program etc. Let us know if you have any suggestions for a topic/entertainment etc. *The van Seventers and Huizinga*

With thankfulness in our hearts to God, we announce the arrival of Ethan on 16 Nov

2003. He arrived at 3.48am and 'weighed in' at 4.68kg or 10lb 5oz. A big boy. Antoinette and baby are doing well. *John and Antoinette Koolaard*

Silverstream

Church BBQ On Saturday 22 November there will be a Church BBQ (weather permitting). Please keep this date free and more details will follow.

Wellington

Cadet & Calvinette Mission Project. The Cadets and Calvinettes wish to thank the congregation for their support in the fundraising for the Mission project. Through the children's sponsored work sheets and the Cake Auction we were able to raise enough funds for 44 mosquito nets for the 't Harts to distribute in Papua New Guinea.

Karori Wildlife Sanctuary. On Thursday 13th November the Cadets and Calvinettes are going on a twilight tour of the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary. This is a great time of day to visit, as many birds return to the sanctuary for the night and also we can see the glow worms. Meet at the Hall as normal. The tour will start at 7.45pm. If anyone else is interested in joining us, please ask one of the Counsellors for more details.

Books in focus

Preaching With Spiritual Vigour

Murray Capill, (Published by Christian Focus Publications, 2003.)

Reviewed by Chris Kavanagh

This book by Rev Murray Capill has been produced by him from his doctoral thesis, on the preaching of Richard Baxter. Unlike some other doctoral theses turned into books that I have read, Rev Capill has done an admirable job of making it accessible for the non-academic reader. The book is packed with information content that requires reflection, and needs to be returned to now and again to fully appreciate it. For minister, it can only offer challenge, as Baxter's well-known book, "*The Reformed Pastor*,"* does and was intended to do. For office bearers, and other interested members of congregations, it can give an insightful look into the work of the ministry.

Based on Baxter

Baxter was born in 1615, and died at the age of 75 in 1691. His adult life spanned

the tumultuous years of the Civil War, the Commonwealth and the Restoration, with its following persecution of Nonconformists. He was ordained at age 22, and served a congregation in Bridgnorth for two years until 1640, before moving to nearby Kidderminster. Here he served till 1660. He married in 1662, and he and his wife moved to London, there to carry on his preaching and writing ministry, suffering arrest four times for his activities.

Baxter is best known for his work in Kidderminster. It was then a small market town, his parish consisting of the town itself and 20 surrounding villages, with a total population of about 2000 adults, or 800 households. Baxter visited each of these every year, and though he did have an assistant during his time there, his visiting accounted for the majority of his time every week. He considered his preaching ministry to go hand-in-hand with his pastoral ministry,

Advertise your Happenings
and Church events in

faith in
focus

and in a way to be an extension of it.

His visits were of a teaching nature – he called it catechising. He aimed for spiritual benefit for his congregation from his pastoral work. Of course he lived in a different world from ours. He had a parish, that is a geographical “patch” in which to work, and where he would be well-known as the parish minister. People would expect to welcome him into their houses, and he would be a respected member of the community. Within the parish would be all sorts of people – a real cross-section of life – everyone you would expect to meet in a market town and its satellite villages.

Reasons for Baxter’s success

Remarkable strides were made for the Gospel in Kidderminster. When Baxter first arrived there he notes: “*there was about one family in a street that worshipped God and called on his name, and when I came away there were some streets where there was not past one family in a side of a street that did not [do] so; and [who did] not, by professing serious godliness, give us hope of their sincerity*”. What can the remarkable change be attributed to? The work of the Holy Spirit – yes, and as a Puritan, Baxter would be the first to acknowledge this. But he himself sets out ten reasons for the success in Kidderminster, which are recounted on pages 20 – 25 of the book. They are – in slightly amended form:

1. The congregation at Kidderminster was not sermon-proof. Its previous minister, who had been there since 1628, was notoriously unspiritual, worldly and slack in his work. The congregation had not heard preaching for 12 years at least.
2. Baxter was a naturally gifted speaker, and a gifted preacher, and although often sick, he threw himself into the work. His motto was: “*I preached as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men*”.
3. He had a peaceful congregation at Kidderminster, not torn by strife, unorthodox teaching, special interest groups, or contention. He said of Kidderminster as a whole: “*Not a Separatist, Anabaptist, Antinomian, etc in town*”. He could devote his whole energies to the work of the Gospel, and not be dragged into issues.
4. His congregation had time to consider the things of which he taught. They were mostly tradespeople, and as such were not over-occupied with their own affairs or the affairs of the world.
5. Baxter was single. He was able to “*take his people for his children*”. He had time for them.
6. The sixth reason sounds rather odd – but, as Rev Capill put it, “*they were top quality sinners*”. Baxter comments on

“*the quality of the sinners of the place*”, and noted that they were on the whole bad. In other words, he had some real, obvious sinners to minister to.

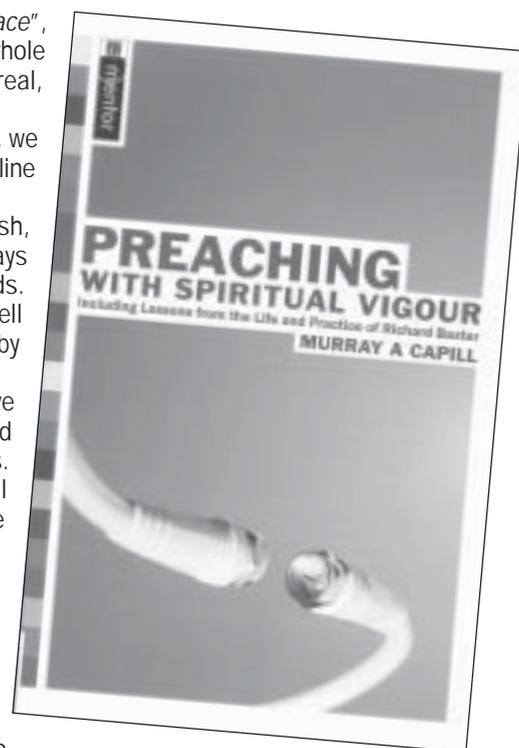
7. In conjunction with the last reason, we note that he practised church discipline faithfully.
8. He preached the truth to the parish, and brought the truth to them in ways and words according to their needs. His preaching was practical as well as doctrinal, which it could only be by his knowing his parish well.
9. The people were not rich. He gave practical help to those in need, and especially he loved to give books. He was also called upon for medical advice, which he had a good store of from his own chronic illnesses.
10. Baxter considered the long length of his ministry to be a factor in the success of the Gospel in Kidderminster.
I am left doubting if the conditions in any of our RCNZ congregations could come up to Kidderminster ??

Two models for ministry

About two-thirds of the book is an analysis of what Rev Capill calls “*preaching with spiritual vigour*,” in the way that Baxter did, and using Baxter as a model, but remembering that hand-in-hand with his preaching went Baxter’s pastoral work. Rev Capill contrasts two models for ministry in chapter 3 – “*Shepherding Souls*.” One is the minister as the CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of a big company. The other is the minister as shepherd. The CEO model is much to the fore in some denominations. It depends on having a big congregation (the so-called mega-church), where the minister organises, leads, “empowers”, is a charismatic leader who manages his team, communicates, and motivates his people to reach defined goals. Whatever value these practices may or may not have in the business world, they are out of place in the Church. Under this model small churches are intent on becoming as large as possible, and struggle if they do not. Their ministers are expected to be everything the mega-church team is – “*vision caster, administrator, marketer, counsellor, youth group leader, and somewhere along the line, the preacher*” (p64). The minister as CEO “*is not so much the shepherd of a small flock but the owner of a massive sheep station, with many farmhands under him*” (p64).

Three principles for pastoral work

Baxter’s strategy of personal catechising was a cornerstone of his shepherding of God’s flock. It is outlined on page 81. They were teaching visits, not simply running through a catechism, but directed to the spiritual needs of the families he saw. Much of the work



was evangelistic – given the parish system, and the “*top quality of the sinners*” he visited and preached to. His system probably cannot be transferred whole and complete to 21st century New Zealand, and our church polity. However, Rev Capill suggests three principles which can be derived from the type of pastoral work Baxter undertook (p83):

1. The priority of spiritual pastoral work.
2. The importance of the breadth of pastoral contact with all sections of the church.
3. This pastoral work to aim to be spiritually significant.

A caveat

I have majored on the first few chapters of the book, which deal with Baxter himself, and his pastoral work, and the relationship between this work and his preaching. I’ve said that a good part of the book is concerned with preaching itself, and the book is very well worth reading for that also. This book is a must read for anyone concerned in preaching – either as a provider or consumer (there goes that business language again). One caveat I have is this: that we do not become discouraged in our work for the Lord by considering the giants of the past. Baxter surely was a giant, and Kidderminster an extremely rare confluence of circumstances, graces and gifts. Yet, we cannot but be challenged by the example. May Rev Capill’s book be to our generation what Baxter’s “*Reformed Pastor*” was to his own.

* Reprinted and published by Banner of Truth

Home mission in focus

Dunedin

Greetings from the picturesque, grand, University city of old Dunedin. Whilst most people "up north" struggle and strive with traffic congestion, rat-race stress, pollution and high prices, here we are in dear old 'Dunners' thoroughly enjoying the relaxed pace, cultural stimulation, beautiful architecture, gorgeous scenery and close proximity to every imaginable convenience. Why does not all of New Zealand live here?

Oh yes! I'm meant to be writing about our evangelistic efforts. Well here in Dunedin, which by the way as far as cities goes is the world's best kept secret, we have a number of 'irons in the home missions fires' some waxing, others waning as the opportunities and needs arise.

Over the last 10 years a number of our folk have been involved in Operation Friendship, forming friendships with overseas university Students. This involves meeting with them on a regular basis by inviting them home for dinner, on outings or to church on

Sundays. The purpose is to give overseas students a positive experience of Christian family life so that when they return home to their native land they will be more favorably disposed towards Christianity or even be willing to spread the word. Since many overseas students come from Asia or the Middle East where Christianity is not the predominant religion, Operation Friendship provides a tremendous opportunity to conduct 'overseas mission' without going overseas.

More recently nine of our people have helped out with prison visitation. This involves working with other churches under the auspices of Prison Fellowship and in co-operation with prison chaplains and wardens to conduct devotions every Wednesday evening and Bible studies on Friday evenings. Four local churches participate in prison visitation which means we take a devotion once every month and lead or take part in weekly Bible studies. Each church goes in with its own members but visitors must

undergo some training with Prison Fellowship before hand. There is also some opportunity for follow-up work with released prisoners and their families. So far we've had good responses from those who attend and the work is appreciated by prison officials.

We encourage our people to evangelise one to one. In order to help facilitate that, we have introduced the congregation to Christianity Explained (*Scripture Union*) as a tool to introduce newcomers to the faith. Furthermore we are make use of the Living Proof Evangelism Training Course (*Nav Press*) designed to help equip people with skills for pre-evangelism, i.e. befriending people and introducing matters of faith in everyday conversation in a winsome manner. We have found this a very helpful program and plan to run it again in 2004. John Haverland has written a brief evaluation of the course in the February 2003 edition of FiF. The March 2003 issue has an evaluation of Christianity Explained.

Hans Vaatstra

Wellington

Every year the community of Brooklyn close off the main street for one day in November to hold the Brooklyn Festival. The last 4 years the Wellington church has had a stall there selling plants, pots and Christian books. This year we decided to do something a little different and so the youthclub organized a puppet show, face painting, a game and colouring in for the children. The theme was "the real meaning of Christmas". We ran two

puppets shows back to back. One about the wise men following the star and the other about Christmas being more than receiving presents, and the greatest present of all – Gods son who came to redeem us.

The weather was great on the day and the puppets were a real hit with the kids. We also handed out pamphlets from the Bible society about the wise men story as well as information about the Sunday school and the Cadets and Calvinettes. The adult

version of the pamphlet included an invitation to our Christmas service.

All money raised from donations for the face painting and game were for the Wellington City mission. It was really great to see so many of our youth involved and representing our church in the local community. We are looking forward to being back at the Brooklyn Festival again next year. We would encourage all the other churches to consider doing this in their local community. It is a great way to raise awareness of our denomination in our own neighbourhood.

Marianne Bos – Home & Overseas Mission Evangelism Committee

