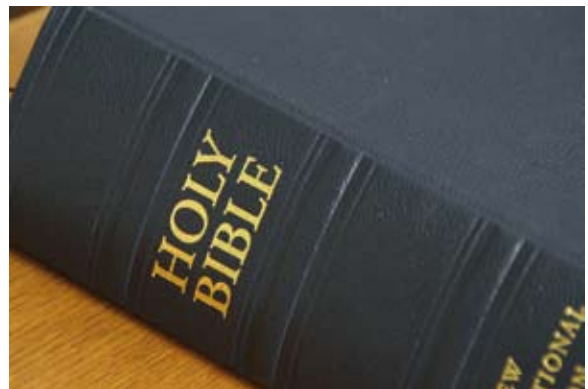


Federal Vision – another destructive error?

The Auburn
Avenue Theology



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Editorial

Blessed New Year to all the readers of Faith in Focus, in the year of our LORD 2011. Globally, last year was an eventful one, with many natural occurrences changing the landscape in many countries. There have been floods, tsunamis, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, cyclones, hurricanes, blizzards, droughts, fires, etc, which have had a huge impact on the local people where these occurrences have taken place. "For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now." (Rom 8:20-22)

Similarly the church of Jesus Christ suffers from ongoing occurrences. News of this or that issue, some new fad in worship, some new "shining light" with a new perspective/understanding on what the Scriptures teach etc, etc. You only have to read church history to know that this is true. Issues come, issue go. One such issue we are looking at in this issue is "Federal Vision" or "The Auburn Avenue Theology", which two of our sister churches in North America (OPC and URCNA) have declared to be an error.

I can hear someone ask "why publish articles on what is a North American problem? Why even mention it? Who's even interested?" Answer: "What's going on overseas is essentially modern church history in the making. We read past history to inform and arm us against any future developments – 'forewarned is forearmed.'" (Mr P Archbald)

Mr Michael Flinn gives us "some initial thoughts" about FV (Federal Vision). Mr Alan D Strange, a Minister in the OPC USA, helps us to "understand the FV". Mr Anthony R Dallison, a Minister in the Westminster Presbyterian Church in the USA, writes "A review of *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision*". I would encourage our subscribers to read Mr Michael Flinn's article carefully, taking note of his "tentative conclusions" and then read the other two articles, which give further information on FV.

NB: These articles are for the instruction and edification of the readers of this magazine. It is not the editors' intention that these give rise to any controversy within the RCNZ, but rather, that we would be adequately equipped to deal with such issues should they appear on our shores.

Mrs Sally Davey writes about "The joys of home couture". This raises the perennially interesting subject of fashion and clothing.

Mr Maurice Roberts, past editor of *The Banner of Truth*, looks at "God's secrets – the believer's comforts". Mr Dirk van Garderen asks on behalf of the National Diaconate: "Should there be A.C.C.E.S.S after C.A.R.E.?"

Mrs Harriet Haverland has compiled the Gleanings column for us this issue, with an interesting new format, helping us find the relevant news at a glance.

The Thought of God – Maurice Roberts – p107

A Slothful, unfeeling religion is not the faith we read of in the Bible. There is such a thing as following the Lord *fully*. There is such a thing as fearing the Lord *greatly*. There is such a thing as the wish to see God glorified here and now *on earth*. Then let all right-hearted men pray for grace to cast off the mantle of complacency and gird up their loins with fresh zeal for the task.

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

Federal Vision – another destructive error? (1)

Federal Vision: some initial thoughts

Michael Flinn

1 Introduction

Readers of *Faith in Focus* may or may not have heard of the theological movement or school of thought known as “federal vision” (FV).

I take up the editor’s invitation to write on this subject with some degree of hesitation for the following reasons:

- 1) “FV” (or “Auburn Avenue Theology” as it has also come to be known) is a very recent theological development that has sparked considerable controversy in the North American Reformed world. Since the dust is yet to settle, so to speak, it is difficult to write an assessment or critique with any degree of certitude. Moreover, without being part of the North American ecclesiastical context in which the controversy has arisen, it is difficult for a writer such as I to assess both the movement, and reactions to it.
- 2) Many writers and ministers, who might happily identify themselves with the FV school of thought, have yet to publish carefully written, definitive works on the subject. Much of the discussion surrounding this movement has arisen on Internet discussion groups and blog sites. The result has been a wide and rapid dissemination of large quantities of (not particularly scholarly) material.¹ Furthermore, the writers who associate themselves with FV do not always agree with each other on the details. This makes it difficult to speak definitively about what *federal vision* teaches or expresses.
- 3) Here in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, we should be very cautious about importing into our own circles controversies that are taking place in other parts of the Reformed world. Of course, on the level of interchurch relations, we must certainly take careful note of theological statements or positions officially adopted by our sister churches, but we do not

need to hold similar discussions and debates here unless there is unrest within the churches that requires synodical study committees and reports. The purpose of this article is certainly *not* to stir up unrest here in New Zealand, but rather to inform our readers about theological discussions and developments in another part of the Lord’s vineyard.

2 Background

With the above caveats in place, the origins of the movement, and some responses to it are as follows:²

In January 2002, the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church (Presbyterian Church in America) hosted its annual pastors’ conference on the subject of “The Federal Vision: An examination

public call for repentance by the four speakers, charging them, among other things, with “denial of justification by faith alone”.³

Since then, in 2006, an Orthodox Presbyterian Church “Report on Justification” stated that “aberrant views of justification have been promulgated from within these circles” [i.e. FV circles] and found it necessary to reaffirm its commitment to the traditional understanding of the doctrine of justification. In 2007, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) produced a non-binding report concluding that the teachings of FV on election, justification, and other doctrines are contrary to the Westminster Standards. And in June 2009, the Reformed Church in the US rejected FV as not being in accordance with its

“The Reformed Presbyterian Church in the US, issued a public call for repentance by the four speakers, charging them, among other things, with “denial of justification by faith alone”.”

of Reformed Covenantalism”. Speakers Douglas Wilson, John Barach, Steve Wilkins and Steve Schlissel addressed various aspects of a covenantal (i.e. federal) approach to church membership, the raising of children, assurance of salvation, the sacraments, etc. Soon afterwards, in June 2002, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the US, a small Presbyterian denomination, issued a

doctrinal standards. Even more recently, the United Reformed Churches have also discussed and rejected FV (cf. the reference to this in Rev. Peter Kloosterman’s report on their recent synod, published in an earlier edition of FF.)

3 FV tenets

3.1 *Trinity and Covenant*

When discussing the idea of *covenant*,

FV writers distance themselves from the notion of a forensic, contractual arrangement with a particular goal or end in view. Instead they speak of covenant as a *relationship* between persons.⁴ Moreover, the foundation or model for all *other* covenantal relationships is thought to be the eternal covenant that the members of the Triune God enjoy with each other.⁵

3.2 *The Doctrine of the Covenant of Works*

The Westminster Confession (ch. 7.2) states that “the first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and to him and to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience”. The implication of this language is that at some point *after* God had created Adam, he established a condi-

3.3 *The Covenant of Grace*

The Westminster Confession affirms that because of the Fall, God was pleased to make a *second* covenant, “commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe” (ch. 7.3). The Confession goes on to state that this second covenant “was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel”. However, there are “not two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations” (ch. 7.5,6).

FV writers enthusiastically affirm the *one* covenant of grace, arguing that the postlapsarian covenants with Adam

The number of the elect is fixed from eternity past and may not be increased or diminished. The covenant is God’s administration of salvation in space and time, the historical outworking of his eternal plan. We have then two basic perspectives, the decretal/eternal and the covenantal/historical, through which to view salvation. To do full justice to the biblical teaching, we must distinguish covenant and election without separating them. Sometimes Scripture simply conflates the elect and the covenant body, such as in Eph. 1:3ff and 2 Thess. 2:13. Other times, Scripture distinguishes the elect from the covenant community, such as when the biblical writers warn that some within the covenant will fall away (Rom. 11, 1 Cor. 10). To follow the Biblical model, we must view our fellow church members as elect and regenerate and threaten them with the dangers of falling away. This is not contradictory because we admit we only have a creaturely knowledge of God’s decree. We can never, in this life, know with absolute certainty, who the elect are. So we have to make evaluations and declarations in terms of what has been revealed, namely the covenant (Dt. 29:29).⁸

“[FV writers] emphases and definitions seem to me to be a little facile, speculative and not arising from clear exegesis of Scripture.”

tional covenant with him whereby he would have received “life” as long as he maintained “perfect and personal obedience”.

FV writers have questioned the language, if not the substance of the Confession at this point. For one thing, given their view of the Trinitarian covenant being the basis for all other relationships (see 3.1 above), once God had created Adam, he did not make a special (first) covenant with him some time later. Rather, he was in covenant with Adam the moment the first man was created. More importantly, they believe that the terminology “covenant of works” is unhelpful because it suggests the idea of *merit*, i.e. that eternal life would be the payment (wages) for perfect obedience. Douglas Wilson therefore prefers to speak of “a covenant of creational grace” rather than a “covenant of works” and Ralph Smith affirms more pejoratively that the covenant of works is “clearly antiquated because of its notion of merit”.⁶

and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David and then the new covenant that we read of in Scripture are the successive unfolding of the one covenant of grace that finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ.⁷

3.3 *Covenantal objectivity*

FV writers go on to affirm the “objectivity” of the covenant, i.e. that all covenant members are to be regarded as part of God’s family regardless of whether or not they are “of the elect” in terms of the eternal divine decrees of election and reprobation. Thus, just as God “elected” the entire nation of Israel in the time of the Old Covenant, but some fell away through covenant unfaithfulness, so under the New Covenant, the entire church should be regarded as covenantally “elect”. Rich Lusk explains:

If we oversimplify, we can say that election relates to God’s eternal plan to save a people for himself.

3.4 *Covenant and the Sacraments*

FV writers stress that baptism incorporates a person into the church and into covenant with God. From that point, a person should be regarded as a Christian and spoken of as a Christian unless he or she breaks covenant with God in rebellion and apostasy. FV preachers prefer not to think of their congregations and preach to them as comprising regenerate *and* unregenerate persons. They prefer to speak of and preach to their congregations as being in covenant with God (i.e. as Christian), to call them to covenantal obedience and to warn them of the dangers of becoming covenant breakers. To put it another way: in FV circles, members of the church are not encouraged to look *inwardly* and to assess *subjectively* whether they have experienced conversion or whether they are of the elect. Rather, the emphasis is that they are elect because they are in covenant with God. And the call is to walk in covenant faithfulness and obedience instead of falling away and thereby suffering cov-

enant wrath and judgment.

Corresponding to this stress upon the continuity of the old and new covenants in Scripture, and to baptism as the entrance into covenant with the Lord, some FV proponents also advocate paedocommunion, *i.e.* the belief that baptized children should be permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper prior to their making a public profession of faith.

4 Tentative conclusions

What then can be said by way of conclusion? The notes of caution discussed in the introduction to this article are even more pertinent at this point. Please consider these thoughts as not the "final word" on FV but rather, a contribution to a discussion that is far from complete.

- 1) Labels can be helpful or a hindrance. We tend to use them because they help us to "get a handle on" and assess the theological positions of others against our own understanding of Scripture. Labels, to some extent, are inescapable and necessary. But labels can also have the effect of driving wedges between believers: "So and so is a *Federal Vision* proponent. That means he denies the doctrine of justification by grace alone, rejects the covenant of works, believes in paedocommunion, believes in baptismal regeneration, does not believe in conversion, has embraced the views of the New Perspective on Paul, distorts or denies the decrees of election and reprobation, *etc, etc...*" The use of labels in this way drives a person immediately to take sides and most likely run for the nearest escape exit.
- 2) As one who has a particular interest in covenant theology, I appreciate the stress by FV writers on the need to understand more fully and draw out the implications of the covenant of grace. However, some of their emphases and definitions seem to me to be a little facile, speculative and not arising from clear exegesis of Scripture. The definition of *covenant as relationship* and the assumption of an eternal (non-redemptive) covenant between the Persons of the Triune God are cases in point.
- 3) FV authors owe it to their churches and to the Reformed world at large to be very careful when discussing the matter of justification. The doctrine of justification by grace through faith in

Christ alone is one of the hallmarks of the Reformation. We Reformed folk rightly get worked up very quickly about it because it goes to the heart of the gospel. FV writers need to be *crystal clear* what they affirm or do not affirm concerning this doctrine. A lack of clarity in this matter will never be helpful.

- 4) The doctrine of the covenant of works is not developed in any depth in the Westminster Confession and I suggest we should be cautious about reading into or extrapolating from that expression a detailed and highly developed soteriology (doctrine of salvation). Interestingly, FV authors are not the first to hesitate over the WCF's terminology at this point. For example, John Murray, a fine defender and exponent of Westminster theology, wrote concerning the expression "covenant of works" that "the term is not felicitous for the reason that the elements of grace entering into the administration are not properly provided for by the term 'works'".
- 5) Readers of this article who are familiar with the differences of opinion between Kuyper and Schilder on baptism will be aware that tensions regarding how to view and speak of baptised members of the church are not new and that differences of opinion on such matters have the potential to split churches. These kinds of issues remain a pastoral as well as a theological challenge, as every parent and pastor knows. On this note, how about this for a suggestion: Before baptism the minister should inform the congregation "that children, by baptism, are solemnly received into the bosom of the visible church, distinguished from the world, and them that are without, and united with believers; and that all who are baptized in the name of Christ, do renounce, and by their baptism are bound to fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh; that they are Christians and federally holy before baptism, and therefore are they baptized..." Could those within and without the FV camp see this as a way forward? In point of fact, this suggestion reaches back to the Westminster divines themselves in the guidance that they provided in *The Directory for the Publick Worship of God*.

In conclusion, I hope this article has been interesting and informative, but I hope

also that it does not foment tension and controversy within our own churches in relation to the doctrines and viewpoints of "Federal Vision".

Endnotes

1. Guy Prentiss Waters, an outspoken and published critic of FV theology, comments on the challenge presented by "this unceasing influx of information" in his book entitled *The Federal Vision and Covenant Theology* (P. & R. Publishing, 2006, p. 5) but nonetheless asserts that it is possible to discuss the "basic positions" of the movement.
2. For the material in this section, I am indebted to a Wikipedia article entitled "Federal Vision".
3. Other names now associated with the movement are James Jordan, Peter Leithart, Ralph Smith, Rich Lusk, Joel Garver and Mark Horne (this list is supplied by Guy Prentiss Waters, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-10). The Wikipedia article adds Randy Booth, Tim Gallant, and Jeff Meyers. Norman Shepherd has also come to be associated with FV.
4. Waters, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
5. It is important to note here that FV writers are not at this point speaking of what theologians have called the "covenant of redemption", *i.e.* an agreement formed between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in order to effect man's salvation (a doctrine founded upon such passages as John 17:6-12). Rather, they affirm that the Persons of the Triune God have only ever related to one another by way of covenant and that this divine reality becomes the model and foundation for all other covenants, for example, the covenant between a man and woman in marriage (*cf.* Malachi 2:14). FV writers often speak in this connection of Cornelius van Til's discussion of the Trinity as being the only acceptable solution to the philosophical problem of the "one and the many" or the "universal and the particular". In a similar way, the *covenantal nature* of the Triune God becomes the basis for all other covenants.
6. Waters, *op. cit.* pp. 32,34.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
8. Cited in Wikipedia article on "Federal Vision".
9. John Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. 2, p. 49. Murray preferred instead to speak more generally of "the Adamic Administration".

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Federal Vision – another destructive error? (2)

Understanding the “Federal Vision”



Alan D. Strange

The movement that has come to be known as the “Federal Vision” came to the attention of many in Presbyterian and Reformed circles following a pastor’s conference at Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Monroe, Louisiana, in January 2002. The word *federal* means “covenantal.” Federal Vision proponents seek to revitalize and develop the doctrines of the covenant and the church.

There are some legitimate concerns that the Federal Vision has raised, especially in our current ecclesiastical context. Being afflicted as we are, in

this land, with a low view of the church, the Federal Vision proponents strike significant chords in support of a high view of the means of grace and of the visible church. They eschew a view of the church that would stress the invisible at the expense of the visible and that would exalt the individual and the subjective above the corporate and the objective. They rightly observe that much of the church is afflicted with a low view of the means of grace (especially preaching and the sacraments), the obligation to live holy lives, and the inseparability of justification and sanctification. The solution to these problems, however, lies in the historic Reformed faith at its best. While even Reformed and Presbyterian churches may suffer from what ails the broader body of evangelical churches, they do so not because of their theology but in spite of it.

Over-reaction

The problem with the Federal Vision is its tendency to overreact to problems in broader evangelicalism and in certain Reformed circles. For example, subjectivism is rejected by embracing an exaggerated objectivism. The proponents of the whole Federal Vision program routinely seek a theological fix for problems that ought to

be addressed pastorally. It seems to be thought that the problems must reflect shortcomings in Reformed theology, when in fact they reflect shortcomings in Reformed practice. There’s nothing wrong with our theology, except that we fail to live up to it. Our standards are not deficient; rather, our department is. Too often we fail to be in practice who we truly are in Christ. The solution to lives that are not what they should be is not theological reformulation, as Federal Vision proponents would claim, but faithful living within our already well-developed theological system. It is the best expression of Scripture that the church has, by God’s guidance and grace, developed thus far.

Twenty errors that are held by one or more advocates of the Federal Vision are listed in the conclusion of the report of the OPC’s Committee to Study the Doctrine of Justification:

1. Pitting Scripture and Confession against each other.
2. Regarding the enterprise of systematic theology as inherently rationalistic.
3. A mono-covenantalism that sees one covenant, originating in the intra-Trinitarian fellowship, into which man is invited, thus flattening the concept of covenant and denying the distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.
4. Election as primarily corporate and eclipsed by covenant.
5. Seeing covenant as only conditional.
6. A denial of the covenant of works and of the fact that Adam was in a relationship with God that was legal as well as filial.
7. A denial of a covenant of grace distinct from the covenant of works.
8. A denial that the law given in Eden is the same as that more fully published at Mt. Sinai and that it requires perfect obedience.
9. Viewing righteousness as relational, not moral.

“They rightly observe that much of the church is afflicted with a low view of the means of grace (especially preaching and the sacraments), the obligation to live holy lives...”

10. A failure to make clear the difference between our faith and Christ's.
11. A denial of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ in our justification.
12. Defining justification exclusively as the forgiveness of sins.
13. The reduction of justification to Gentile inclusion.
14. Including works (by use of "faithfulness," "obedience," etc.) in the very definition of faith.
15. Failing to affirm an infallible perseverance and the indefectibility of grace.
16. Teaching baptismal regeneration.
17. Denying the validity of the concept of the invisible church.
18. An overly objectified sacramental efficacy that downplays the need for faith and that tends toward an *ex opere operato* [automatically effective] view of the sacraments.
19. Teaching paedocommunion.
20. Ecclesiology that eclipses and swallows up soteriology.

Justification the hinge

Some of these points, to be sure, warrant elaboration more than others. The doctrine of justification is indeed, as John Calvin wrote, "the hinge on which religion turns." As such, it is of the utmost importance that we get this doctrine right. This was the burden of the Reformers above all: if they did not get this doctrine right, then they did not get anything right, and the Reformation was an error or worse. The OPC's commitment to getting the gospel right, which in this case means faithfully proclaiming the biblical doctrine of justification, is what led to the study committee being set up.

Thus, what the Federal Vision teaches about justification is of the greatest concern. Many of the points enumerated above touch rather directly on what the Federal Vision teaches about justification over against the Scriptures and the Westminster standards. Specifically, the Westminster Confession teaches that God is righteous, requires us to be righteous, condemns fallen Adam and his offspring for unrighteousness, establishes righteousness by Christ's work, and regards us as righteous because of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Doubtless, there are those identified with the Federal Vision who would not disagree with this. Yet, it is undeniable that there are Federal Vision proponents whose teachings do undermine the historic Reformed

doctrine of justification as set forth in our secondary standards.

Historic Reformed theology has also understood its doctrine of justification to entail a blessed sense of assurance on the part of believers and to guarantee their perseverance to the end. If faith is reconceived as faithfulness, or is thought to include such in its basic definition, as it is for many who promote the Federal Vision, then assurance, as conceived in the Scriptures and Westminster standards, must also be recast.

It is interesting that so many of the men who promote the Federal Vision do so with the express intent of addressing the problem of assurance. The contention of these Federal Vision writers is that many Reformed and Presbyterian church members suffer from a lack of assurance that stems from morbidly introspective self-examination. The reason, say the Federal Vision men,

urged, to take ten looks at Christ for every look at oneself.

Compounding problems

But Federal Vision objectivism notwithstanding, unless one believes that the sacraments are saving apart from faith (and not a single Federal Vision proponent believes that), assurance will always be a problem when faith is redefined as faithfulness or obedience, because every honest, sensitive soul will have questions about whether he has been obedient enough. Looking at one's own faithfulness (and wondering about one's future faithfulness) is not calculated to increase assurance. The Federal Vision in this respect is not able to solve the problems that it addresses, but instead, arguably, compounds the problems.

The Federal Vision proponents think that too much fuss is being made over the Federal Vision. Given the poor state

“The problem with the Federal Vision is its tendency to overreact to problems in broader evangelicalism and in certain Reformed circles.”

that some Christians engage routinely in such unproductive self-examination is that their view of the faith is overly subjective.

Covenantal objectivism

The cure for such spiritual navel-gazing, according to Federal Vision advocates, is a healthy dose of covenantal objectivism, in which baptism is said to regenerate, the Lord's Supper is given to all the baptized (apart from a profession of faith), and election is to be read through the covenant, so as to avoid pesky dithering about whether one is or is not elect. If such covenantal objectivism could be properly understood and embraced, so goes the Federal Vision thinking, one would be pointed away from oneself to all the glorious, objective truths and would be encouraged and assured by them. To be sure, excessive introspection is unhealthy, and one ought, as Horatius Bonar is said to have

of the church (and society as a whole), they say, it behooves us who otherwise have so much in common not to attack each other over minor differences. Rather, we should seek to work together more and work harder to overcome these differences. There is much wisdom in this, if indeed we are talking about minor matters. But the study committee did not consider the matters treated in its report to be minor. The Federal Vision movement needs to understand the Reformed faith better in all its textures and dynamics before urging changes that do not aid, but actually undermine, the faith that we confess, cherish, and seek to propagate.

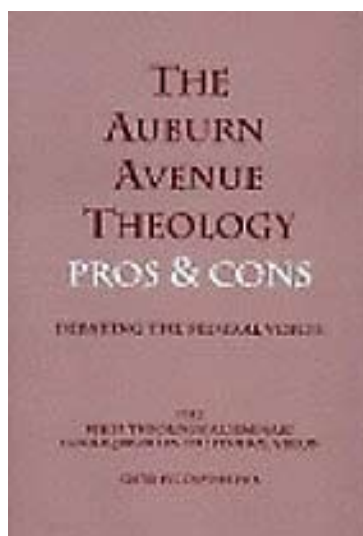
The author, an OPC minister, teaches at Mid-America Reformed Seminary. Reprinted from New Horizons, (Feb 2007) with whom we have a reciprocal agreement.

Federal Vision – another destructive error? (3)

Debating the Federal Vision

A review of *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision*.

By **Anthony R Dallison**



The talks given at the 2002 Auburn Avenue Pastors' Conference (AAPC) at the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church in Monroe, Louisiana, raising questions about the orthodox Reformed doctrines of justification by faith alone, the covenants, election, perseverance, and the sacraments, have become well known subsequently throughout the Reformed community. The book we are reviewing here consists of the papers given on these and other related subjects, delivered at a specially called colloquium (hosted by the editor, Dr. F. Calvin Beisner) in Southern Florida during August 2003. The papers were exchanged and discussed, by seven of the Auburn Avenue Theology/Federal Vision proponents and by seven of its critics. The former are John Barach, Peter J. Leithart, Rick Lusk, Steve M. Schlissel, Tom Trouwborst, Steve Wilkins, and Douglas Wilson. The critics of the Federal Vision are Christopher A. Hutchinson, George W. Knight, III, Richard D. Phillips, Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., Carl D. Robbins, Morton H. Smith; and R. Fowler White.

In a short review of this publication, it is impossible to go into a detailed analysis and criticism of the views expressed by the Federal Visionists on the vital doctrinal matters of the Trinity, the covenants, justification, election, the sacraments, perseverance, and the distinction between the visible and the invisible church. But the conviction of this reviewer is that the "Cons" have won the argument overwhelmingly against the Federal Visionists' position and that the latter are in the most serious danger of departing from Reformed orthodoxy into sacramentalism and even a form of works-righteousness, if indeed this has not already happened despite all their arguments to the contrary.

A reaction

The Federal Visionists are reacting to problems in the contemporary American evangelical and Reformed churches, such as the rampant individualism, the neglect of the covenantal objectivity of salvation, an over-emphasized subjectivity in seeking assurance of salvation, the tendency towards antinomianism in some circles, and an inadequate view of the role of the sacraments as signs and seals of salvation.

Their pastoral concern in these matters is doubtless commendable, but

the re-casting of the normal orthodox understanding of certain vital aspects of Biblical and Reformed theology (cf. the Westminster Standards) raises far more serious problems in the end, than the ones which the Federal Visionists claim to have solved.

Reformulating

For instance, there is an attempt to reformulate the doctrine of the Trinity, to move away from the Reformation commitment to "forensic" justification (by assuming an over-reaction by the Reformers to Rome), to allege that Hellenism and the Enlightenment led to the "scholastic" propositional statements of Reformed doctrine in the Westminster Standards, to read Biblical history as "The Story" involving primarily personal relationships between God and His people (rather than a depository for doctrinal propositions), to deprecate the value of systematic theology, and finally to introduce different views of covenant, faith, baptism, the Lord's Supper, election, regeneration, apostacy, and sacramental efficacy. While it is claimed that all these re-formulations are within the parameters of the orthodox Reformed Faith, this reviewer has been left in no doubt that the Federal Vision is, in the end, contrary to the Westminster

“While it is claimed that all these re-formulations are within the parameters of the orthodox Reformed Faith ... the Federal Vision is, in the end, contrary to the Westminster Standards.”

Standards. One of the critics, Dr. Joseph Pipa, in his response to Steve Wilkins' paper on "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," puts this point concisely in these words: "If I have understood Wilkins in this paper, the Federal Vision is a deviant, unbiblical view of salvation ... the proponents of the Federal Vision hold to a deviant view of the covenant, the active obedience of Christ, the way one receives salvation-justification, the role of baptism in conversion, the relation of the reprobate to Christ and the means of assurance" (p.281).

There are at least three major causes for concern with regard to the Federal Visionists' presentations.

1] The first is methodological errors. As one of the critics has pointed out (p.10), there is a tendency towards faulty hermeneutics and exegesis, implying that all Scriptural terms are always used in the same way (e.g., "baptism" always meaning water baptism), thus abandoning the Reformation principle of the analogy of faith. This same tendency leads to the redefining or ambiguously stating the doctrine of election, regeneration, justification, and adoption, and to a general low regard for any attempt to "systematize" theology.

2] The second is a loss of Biblical balance in regard to covenant theology. Union with the (visible) church automatically implies union with Christ in the Federal Vision teaching, thus over-objectifying the covenant and failing to distinguish between covenantal union in the visible church from the saving union of the invisible church; and in emphasizing covenantal election, atonement, justification, and adoption at the expense of soteriological election, atonement, justification, and adoption (p. 12). There is an attempt to downplay the confessional distinction between the visible and invisible church and to propose another distinction in its place, the historical and eschatological church!

3] The third major cause for concern is the unquestionable incipient sacramentalism in the Federalist position. In reading paper after paper in this colloquium, the reader is left with the conviction that the Federalists impute the efficacy of the thing signified to the sign itself, whether in regard to baptism or the Lord's Supper. The sacraments can communicate blessings apart from faith, and baptism appears to be a converting

ordinance. The Federal Vision states that the unbelieving feed upon Christ when they partake of the Lord's Supper, and that a person is given new life by virtue of baptismal union with Christ.

Serious errors

There appears to be an erroneous view of the doctrine of justification held by the Federalists, with the claim that one cannot understand Paul's teaching on justification apart from dealing with the Gentile problem and that in the Old Testament the instrument of justification was covenant faithfulness and not

Cal Beisner, when he writes: "Extensive study of their [the Federalists'] oral and written teachings on the special concerns of the Federal Vision convinces me that they have taught, alongside some wonderful truths, some serious errors about covenant theology and its implications for salvation, personal and corporate spirituality and piety, the use and understanding of the sacraments and the conduct of theology and biblical studies in general. Sadly, their mistakes undermine their very laudable goals. Their attempt to assure tender souls who doubt their salvation while they trust in Christ

“The proponents of the FV hold to a deviant view of the covenant, the active obedience of Christ, the way one receives salvation-justification, the role of baptism in conversion, the relation of the reprobate to Christ and the means of assurance”

simply trusting in the promises of God. There also appears to be a denial of the role of merit in Christ's work and the imputation of Christ's righteousness in justification.

“Federal Fog”

In conclusion, this reviewer is convinced that the carefully articulated presentations of the great doctrines of the Reformed and Biblical faith in the Westminster Standards (on election, faith, good works, perseverance, assurance of salvation, the sacraments, etc.) provide still today the effective and truly adequate answer to the problems of the contemporary situation in the Reformed churches. Sadly, the so-called "Federal Vision" is no vision at all in the end, but a "Federal Fog", and that of a most serious nature indeed. One can only agree with the editor of this volume which is being reviewed here,

collapses and the poor souls are left more confused than before, because the objectivity of the covenant is inadequate to the task-while the presumptuous, who hear that aspect of their message may be led, inadvertently, to the false assurance of formalism. At the same time, their attempt to destroy the complacency of the presumptuous is in profound danger of promoting a false legalistic notion of works righteousness" (p.306).

While we recognize that the Westminster Standards should never become an "icon" and that the ecclesia reformata is also subject to the semper reformanda principle ("always being reformed" according to Scripture), the Federal Vision teaching implies a wholesale denial of the Westminster soteriology.

Banner of Truth, June 2004. www.banneroftruth.org

Ninety-nine-year-old daughter of Canadian expeditionary force private killed in WWI to receive father's Bible found in 2009 at the Crown Court Church of Scotland in London, England

An 18 October 2010 article by Andrew McGilligan in the *Telegraph-Journal* titled "A 99-Year-Old Daughter's 'Fairy Tale'" reports that a small version of the King James Bible was discovered 25 December 2009 in the vault of the Crown Court Church of Scotland in London, England, by Clerk of the Session Alan Imrie. On the Bible's inside cover, Mr. Imrie found the name and military address of Pte. Samuel J. Small of Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada, and Mr. Imrie began a search to find Pte. Small's family.

Pte. Samuel J. Small of the Canadian Expeditionary Force 26th Battalion was killed 28 September 1916 during the attempt to take Regina Trench during World War I.

An article about Pte. Small and the Bible was eventually placed in the *Telegraph-Journal*, and relatives of Pte. Small's now ninety-nine-year-old daughter Annie Small Andrews came forward to claim the Bible. Arrangements are being made between family members of Annie Small Andrews and Mr. Imrie to return the Bible to Pte. Small's daughter Annie.

Mr. Imrie hopes the return of the long-lost and forgotten Bible will bring comfort to Annie Small Andrews, commenting: "We were hoping, at best, to find, possibly, grandchildren and had not even considered that Annie might still be with us.

"There's something very special about being able to reunite Annie with a relic of her father, especially one which appears to have his own muddy fingerprints. We had no expectation of finding one of his children still alive and this brings the story to a terrific climax."

+ *Telegraph-Journal*, + *Church of Scotland*

Backlash begins over Free Church of Scotland decision to allow hymns and musical instruments in worship services, and an Anglican tradition begins in Edinburgh

A 22 November 2010 STV article titled "Minister Walks Out on Free Church after Hymn Wrangle" reports that the

Rev. Kenneth Stewart, pastor of the Dowanvale Free Church of Scotland (FCS) in Partick, Glasgow, Scotland, on 21 November 2010, announced to the congregation that he is taking a one month leave of absence to decide whether or not to leave Dowanvale and the FCS because of the 17 November 2010 decision by a plenary assembly of the FCS in Edinburgh, Scotland, after 105 years of legislation to the contrary, to introduce hymns and musical instruments into FCS worship services.

Pastor Stewart told the Dowanvale congregation "It seems clear to me, that in spite of a lifelong adherence to the [FCS] and a lifelong commitment to it, I can no longer continue in it, at least not in office." Mr Stewart additionally said that the assembly vote to introduce hymns and musical instruments into worship services break the vows that FCS ministers make to God upon ordination, and that the 17 November vote contradicts "the law of the church and [was] against the advice of the Assembly Clerks." Mr Stewart added: "The church ought not to have required me to do it. Even the church has no right to alter the meaning of my vows without my consent."

Meanwhile, the Buccleuch & Greyfriars FCS in Edinburgh, Scotland, has scheduled a Lessons and Carols Service for 11 December 2010 at 4:00 p.m.

The first Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols service was held in King's College Chapel in Cambridge, England, the evening of 24 December 1918 in order "to bring a more imaginative approach to worship."

+ *STV, Pacific Quay*

United Church of Christ proposal gives General Minister and President leadership in determining UCC theological perspectives

The Unified Governance Working Group of the United Church of Christ (UCC) on 30 September 2010 published and on 15 October 2010 presented to the UCC Executive Council: "A Proposal for Unified Governance of the National Setting of the United Church of Christ," which includes the following provision in lines 268 – 271 of the report:

"The General Minister and President [GMP] shall be the principle leader in

interpreting the theological perspectives of the United Church of Christ. In consultation with the Collegium, the GMP will develop the foundation of United Church of Christ theological values as guided by the General Synod"

Serious concerns about the proposal are being expressed by several UCC laity and clergy members, concluding that the proposal concentrates too much power into the hands of the GMP and other denominational executives. One UCC member stated: "the attempt to create some kind of UCC Pope is consistent with the rest of the proposal, which seeks to turn the UCC on its head so that it is run completely from the top down, with authority and power expressly concentrated in a few selected people."

+ *United Church of Christ*

Latvian reformed website begins operation

A new Latvian reformed website called "Luxmundi" has begun operation at www.luxmundi.lv, and exists to translate, promote, distribute, and encourage the writing of reformed literature in the Baltic States.

+ *Carl and Becky Chaplin*

Sarah Palin characterised as hardcore feminist with no Christian/biblical view of what God says is the role of mothers/wives

Responding to the 2 November 2010 appearance on Fox News of Sarah Palin, where Mrs. Palin asserted that the issue of whether mothers with small children should or should not work outside the home is a "petty, little, superficial, meaningless thing," *The American View* editor John Lofton wrote that Mrs. Palin's comment, "reveals, with a vengeance, that [Mrs. Palin] is a hard-core feminist, with no Christian/biblical view whatsoever of what a wife/mom ought to be. [Mrs. Palin's] referring to those who believe moms should work in the home to raise their own children as 'Neanderthals' is a slap in the face to millions of mums struggling to do this in obedience to God and His Word."

The 25 November 2009 Presbyterians Week article "[5] ProLifeProfiles.com Exposes Sarah Palin's 'Shocking to the Conscience' Record on Pro-Life Issues," reported on American Right To

Life's disclosure of further evidence of Palin's hard-core feminism in regard to Mrs. Palin's checkered pro-life history including:

- Palin in 2009 appointed a Planned Parenthood board member to the Alaska Supreme Court;
- Palin argues that chemical abortifacients that kill the youngest children should be legal;
- Palin indicates support for public funding to kill some unborn children;
- Palin allows her name to be used in ads promoting grisly government-funded embryonic stem cell "research"; and,
- Palin undermines the God-given right to life by promoting evolution while officially opposing creation.

+ *Christian News Wire*

Evangelical Theological Society 17-19 November 2010 meeting with the theme 'Justification by Faith' includes New Perspectives on Paul Advocate the Rt. Rev. N. T. Wright as plenary speaker

Steve Matthews posted a 6 November 2010 article on the Lux Lucet blog titled "Justification by Faith (but not by Faith Alone) at ETS," which reports that the upcoming 17-19 November 2010 meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) with the theme of 'Justification by Faith' includes New Perspectives on Paul advocate the Rt. Rev. N.T. Wright, Bishop of Durham (Church of England), as one of the plenary speakers.

Mr. Matthews expresses concern that the ETS meeting theme is not 'Justification by Faith Alone' "as you would expect from an evangelical organisation" and continues: "This is a disgrace. The Apostle Paul refused "to yield submission even for an hour" to false brethren who taught a false gospel of faith and works. He hurled anathemas at them. He said of them they, "want to pervert the gospel of Christ." But the folks at ETS are too gentlemanly for such language. No, instead they invite wolf, false brother and perverter of the gospel N.T. Wright (he's one of the plenary speakers at the conference) to spread his heresy at the ETS annual conference, and all this without a hint of rebuke. Even the title of the conference "Justification by Faith" is a concession to Wright's false teaching. The Reformation was all about justification by faith ALONE, but ETS can't seem to bring itself to say the word. It seems to

me that since the Roman Catholics also believe in justification by faith – it's the "alone" part they choke on – ETS may as well extend a conference invite to Benedict XVI. I'm sure he'd feel right at home."

+ *Lux Lucet Blog*

Palestinian-American Christian asserts distorted eschatology trumps ethics in some evangelical Christians regarding modern Israel

A 15 November 2010 article by Ken Camp in *The Baptist Standard* titled "Palestinian-American Christian Says Eschatology Can Distort Justice" reports on the Global Faith Forum at NorthWood Church (Baptist) in Keller, Texas, where one of the speakers was Henry Mikhail, a Christian Arab born in Jerusalem, Israel, who serves on a peace and justice work group of the Reformed Church in America's General Synod Council.

Mr. Mikhail told the assembly that eschatology equating modern Israel with the Israel of biblical prophecy has led some evangelical Christians to allow their eschatology to trump ethics regarding the Middle East. Mr. Mikhail said that he is not against Israel, but against "unjust and oppressive Israeli policies."

Mr. Mikhail continued: "Because of American evangelicals' embrace of the current state as the Israel of prophecy, they have supported policies that are harsh and oppressive-even against Christians, which is very ironic. Because of support from American evangelicals, Israel has been given a blank check-has been blindly supported and backed, right or wrong. And I believe that's been unfortunate and unfair."

Ken Camp added that Henry Mikhail insisted ethnic lineage and nationality do not matter to God, and that the biblical promises of God to Israel belong to those who have entered into a faith relationship with [God].

+ *The Baptist Standard*

Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) fighting Oklahoma proposition to ban application of Foreign Law and Sharia Law in court decisions

A 14 November 2010 article on the Vision to America website titled "CAIR Fights Oklahoma Anti-Sharia Law, Not Jihadis" reports that the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) convinced Chief U.S. District Judge for the Western District of Oklahoma Vicki Miles-LaGrange to issue a temporary re-

straining order blocking Oklahoma's new state constitutional amendment forbidding Oklahoma courts from using foreign law or Muslim Sharia Law to decide court cases. The constitutional amendment was favoured by seventy percent of Oklahoma voters in the 2 November 2010 election.

The restraining order will remain in place until at least 22 November 2010, when a court hearing is scheduled.

+ *Christian Worldview Communications LLC*

U.S. Military Chaplains Told "Embrace Homosexual Military or Get Kicked Out"

A 2 December 2010 press release by former U.S. Navy Chaplain Gordon James Klingenschmitt of Pray In Jesus Name Ministries titled "Chaplains Told 'Embrace Homosexual Military or Get Kicked Out'" reports on U.S. Senate hearings on and the implications to U.S. military chaplains if the current policy toward homosexual military members known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) is repealed.

Retired U.S. Army Brigadier General Chaplain Douglas Lee (Presbyterian Church in America) is quoted as saying that if DADT is repealed: "There's a strong possibility that a chaplain wouldn't be allowed to proclaim what their own faith believes, and not give people the information they need to be a good Christian or a good Muslim or what have you. If there's no protection for the chaplain to be able to speak according to his faith group, that might affect the number of chaplains we recruit or our ability to do our duty for the troops."

Alliance Defense Fund attorney Dan Blomberg, who represents a group of chaplains who have already been illegally silenced and pressured to embrace homosexuality in violation of their faith, when asked if active chaplains can be accused of insubordination if they publicly oppose changes to DADT, said the chaplains have been informed by their chain of command that "they should not be commenting on this at this time."

Mr. Blomberg continued: "One chaplain stood up in a high-level meeting created precisely for the purpose of getting service members' thoughts on the repeal of the [DADT] policy. And he asked 'What should chaplains do? What should people of faith do if this policy changes and we have problems of conscience with how it's going to affect us?' That [chaplain] was told by a high-ranking member of the panel that they should just get out of the military."

The press release quoted a Washington Times article reporting that U.S. Army Lt. General Thomas Bostick is demanding that Christian soldiers be fired as bigots if they oppose repeal of DODT and quotes the general as saying: "Unfortunately, we have a minority of service members who are still racists and bigoted and you will never be able to get rid of all of them. But these people opposing this new policy will need to get with the program, and if they can't, they need to get out. No matter how much training and education of those in opposition, you're always going to have those that oppose this on moral and religious grounds just like you still have racists today."

Former U.S. Navy Chaplain Gordon James Klingenschmitt of Pray In Jesus Name Ministries in 2007 was court-martialed and honourably discharged for praying "in Jesus name" while in uniform.

+ *Pray In Jesus Name Ministries*

Persecution of Christians in Bangladesh

Compass Direct News Service reports that Muslim neighbours of the Christian family of Foyez Uddin, 62 in Bangladesh, in Joysen village in Rangpur district north of Dhaka, insulted, beat them and filed a false charge of attempted murder against them and other Christians on 17th September 2010. Uddin's neighbour Nazrul Islam, who is a policeman, told Uddin, his wife and his two adult children that as Christians they were "polluting society by deviating from Islam." The angry neighbours broke into Uddin's home, which serves as a worship venue, burned two Bibles, tore two others, ripped four hymnals and damaged some furniture and chairs. The villagers also hacked the sign of their house church 'Faith Bible Church of God' with a machete. The pastor of the church told *Compass* that he went to a nearby police station to complain about the attack, but officers did not respond. Uddin's family were to be baptised during the last week of September, but because they are still in custody due to the false charges they could not be baptised. *Compass Direct News Service* additionally reports that since Uddin became a Christian in 2007, some of his neighbours have threatened to kill him or expel him from the village. One of the main tactics used by the Muslim villagers who opposed Christians in the area was to withhold work from them.

WEA Religious Liberty – November 2010

Pastor sentenced to death in Iran

According to *VOM Canada* Pastor Youcef Nardarkhani, a leader in the Full Gospel "Church of Iran" network, has been sentenced to death for what is called a "thought crime" in Iran. The Pastor was arrested in October 2009 after protesting a decision by the government requiring that his son study the Qur'an. The pastor's trial was held in recent weeks in the court, but a formal verdict has not yet been delivered.

WEA Religious Liberty – November 2010

Christian fined for having a Christian movie in Uzbekistan

Forum 18 News service spread the news that Uzbekistan has imposed a massive fine on a Protestant believer Murat Jalalov for owning a Christian film after police raided his home. The film and other confiscated materials for analysis by the state Religious Affairs Committee was ordered to be destroyed. Forum 18 further reports separately, that a man – not a religious believer – has been fined for refusing to reveal his son's whereabouts. The son is being hunted by police for his religious activity.

WEA Religious Liberty – November 2010

Massive attack against Christians in Iraq

Worldwide attention has been drawn to a shocking attack on Christians in Baghdad, Iraq. *Compass Direct News Service* reports that on 31st October 2010 at least 58 people, mostly Christian, were killed and more than 80 others severely injured when Islamic militants stormed the Syriac Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Salvation in Baghdad's Karrada district during Mass. The Islamic militants, claiming responsibility for the attack, are members of a militant organisation called the Islamic State of Iraq, which has links to al Qaeda. The gunmen entered the building armed with automatic weapons and explosives and demanded that the Coptic Church of Egypt release Iranian women whom the extremists claim voluntarily converted to Islam but were locked up in the church. About four hours after the siege, Iraqi security forces launched an assault on the church building. The attack was the deadliest one against the country's Christians since Islamic extremists began targeting them in 2003.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) officially condemned Sunday's terrorist attack on Baghdad's Our Lady of Salva-

tion Catholic church and expressed its sincere condolences to the victims and their families.

WEA Religious Liberty – November 2010

Missionary beaten in Nepal

Indra Rai Waglan, a Gospel for Asia-supported missionary, was brutally beaten on 17th October 2010 in Nepal by six men, who accused him of blasphemy, reports *VOM Canada*. Indra has a broken rib and bruises all over his body. The incident happened when the missionary and an elderly believer were travelling to a neighbouring village to conduct a prayer meeting. The six men, who attacked the missionary were identified by the police and their case is before the court.

WEA Religious Liberty – November 2010

In the headlines

World Communion of Reformed Churches issues congratulations to new Roman Catholic Cardinal

Trustees and creditors question spending practices at bankrupt Crystal Cathedral

Church of Scotland and Roman Catholic Church of Scotland mark 450th Anniversary of the Scottish Reformation

Scottish Bible Society to celebrate King James Bible 400th Anniversary with road show rewrite by 16,000 Britons

United Nations climate change meeting in Cancun, Mexico, begins with appeal to Mayan Goddess of the Moon, Reason, Creativity, and Weaving

Feminine focus

Sally Davey

The joys of home couture

Ironically, given ours is a day when personal freedoms are stressed as never before, we live in a world of diminishing choice. Having freed ourselves from the grind of making everything from scratch, we have put ourselves at the mercy of large manufacturers. But as companies become fewer and larger, there is generally less choice for the consumer. Take the matter of clothes, for instance. Where once women personally selected styles and fabrics from their local draper, the choice for both is now in the hands of commercial giants who dictate what we all wear. Unconvinced? Take a glance inside the door of any mid-market chain store this season, and you are greeted by a sea of black clothing, with maybe the odd splash of red. That's the colour *du jour*. The style? Tights, with mini-dresses or tunic tops for everyone, regardless of age. You

don't like them? Sorry, madam, that's all we have this year...

The clothes question

Is there any girl aged between 9 and 90 who isn't interested in clothes? I doubt it. What we wear is an extension of our personality and what we believe; and clothes choices can make a lot of difference to how nice we look. It's no surprise that all of us take a great interest in the colour, style and fit of our clothes. And it's a good thing that we do: the Bible has quite a lot to say about how we should dress ourselves, and indicates that it is a good thing for us to look pleasing, in a way that expresses our Christian character, and is appropriate for the occasion. Some women seem to have a natural instinct for what looks right on them; but most of us have to study the matter, and learn the principles involved, before we get there. In many ways it is a skill to learn. It is a bit of an art, where colour, proportion

and symmetry are involved; and partly a matter of acquired wisdom concerning what is right for given occasions. Some girls learn this from their mothers, some from wise friends and some are able to learn it from courses on the subject, or from good books. All of us would benefit from studying it a little, and most of us could gain some wisdom.

Of course we can overdo the clothes passion – it's possible to become, as the expression has it, a "fashion victim". We can have too many clothes, and we can spend far too much money – or time – on clothes. It's important to dress well, but also to do it with a degree of frugality. The idea is somewhat conveyed by the title of a book I once found: *Dress Like a Million Bucks Without Spending It!*¹. (The contents did not disappoint.) It's not that we need to buy cheap things all the time: wise choices of good-quality items can be a much better investment in the long run. They are often the sort of thing you can wear happily for years.



Sew for your shape and size ...



Simple tailoring can be effective ...



What you may have sewn for your friend's baby girl, thirty years ago ...

The sewing solution

There is a way that we can help ourselves do all of the above better. It is possible to increase our choices, make better decisions about clothes, and do it all more cheaply by sewing our own at home. Women always used to sew their own clothes. In the past almost every home possessed a sewing machine, and most women knew how to cut out patterns, do the sewing and make adjustments for varying sizes by strategic alterations in seams and darts. The more adventurous might even have drafted their own patterns from scratch – using pictures in magazines, or their friends' shop-bought dresses as inspiration. Most girls either learned dressmaking at school – or, more likely, at home from their mothers. I was one of the latter – and I'm grateful to my mother for persevering with an impatient 10 year-old me! Back in the thirties and forties and through until the 1960s, women's magazines regularly featured articles on sewing that discussed and illustrated the latest styles. You could order dressmaking patterns by mail to arrive in your farm mailbox or suburban address. There were many fabric stores, and most large department stores stocked a large range of good-quality fabrics for home sewers. It was relatively easy to purchase everything you needed, even for tailoring reasonably complex suits, or creating your own wedding garments. Women enjoyed sewing, and many were very skilled at it.

Over the years, though, things have changed a great deal. There has been

a huge shift in women's expectations of life, careers, and the way they spend their time. It is not only that most women want to have a well-paid and interesting job in addition to marriage, home and family. It's also a sad fact that it's very difficult to afford a family home if there is only one income to fund it. The fact is that few women have time to sew their own clothes. Even those who enjoyed sewing have given it up for more pressing activities. This, coupled with the fact that cheap mass-production has meant store-bought clothes are even more affordable than home-sewn ones. Why sew when Glasson's or Classic Clothing has ready-made skirts, pants and dresses you can afford by the rackful? But the problem, of course, is that the choice is limited. Go to any shopping mall, and what you see in a chain store will be repeated all over New Zealand and Australia (if not further afield). Internet shopping will only speed up this trend, ten times over. American women who click J.Crew's web site to buy what Michelle Obama wore the day before can now be joined by clickers all over the world... all it takes is a little more postage!

Well – if this is the situation, is there any hope for those who still have time and want to sew their own clothes at home? The result of the downward trend in sewing has been a reduction in the size of pattern books: Vogue, Burda and Butterick now produce a greatly-diminished collection of styles. Presumably, their market has shrunk drastically. Fabric stores and haberdashery departments have closed their doors or slowly disappeared from view. It is apparently the same the world over. Even those diehard home dressmakers who want to keep at it are forced to admit it's getting really hard to source one's materials. But I'd like to offer a few reasons why I believe it's still worthwhile to sew your own clothes.

So why sew?

Firstly, it's because of the choice you have. We've already noted that relying on mass production limits your choice. Those Who Decide may have decreed that black, with bits of red, is what we all should wear. But what if you don't like black and red, and know they don't suit you? You aren't going to be able to find muted blues and browns, which do; so what do you do? You could visit a local fabric store to find the right fabric and sew your own. You're then able to pick the colour that looks best next to

your face for your top, and that which flatters your lower half for your skirt or pants. Then the style: you may have a curvy type of figure. What do you do if everything this year is 1920s style – long, straight, falling in flat lines from shoulder to hemline? This style, you know, may be all very well on boyish shapes, but makes you look as if you're wearing a sack. If you're a sewer you can either find patterns that feature waists and full skirts; or if they aren't on sale this year, pull out your mother's old patterns (as I sometimes do) and use those. There's no need to be a slave to fashions that don't suit you! Perhaps you're a mother concerned about her daughters' dress, or a conscientious teenager who wants to dress modestly and appropriately for a Christian woman, and have trouble finding tops that don't offend in the neckline, or skirts that aren't too short, or trousers that aren't too low on the hips. What do you do? Making your own at home solves all these problems – just alter the pattern if it doesn't dress the wearer modestly. There are plenty of ways to modify necklines, add collars or sleeves, and change the shape or length of a skirt.

Some women have a lot of difficulty finding clothes that fit their irregular shape or size. Are you unusually short for your size 14 or 16? Tall for a size 8? Is your upper half normally size 14, but your lower half only size 12? It can be well-nigh impossible to find a dress that fits you properly. What do you do? Get expensive alterations done every time you buy a dress? If you sew your own at home, you can alter the patterns before you cut out your dresses. With a bit of knowledge and experience, you are soon on the road to creating dresses that fit – every time...

And what about the general perception that clothes are so cheap to buy it's simply not worth sewing any more? My own "take" on this is that while it's certainly true of clothes at the cheap end of the market, it's not true of more expensive and better-quality clothing. As long as you can sew reasonably proficiently, you can save a great deal of money by using well-cut patterns and good quality fabric. Tailored wool jackets and coats are very expensive to buy; but you can make your own at a fraction of the price. If you have a local store that sells discounted silk fabric, for instance, you can make quite lovely shirts or dresses for very little expense.

Finally, there are some good reasons

Christian women at home might want to sew, simply for the love of their sisters in Christ. Remember Dorcas, in that wonderful story in Acts Chapter 9? She was a believer in the town of Joppa who had made a practice of sewing tunics and other garments for the widows of the congregation. When she died, they appealed to the Apostle Peter, who was nearby, to come. On his arrival they told him – indicating the clothes she had sewn them – all she had done to serve them. The Lord restored Dorcas to life that day. What a testimony of love! Is there a way you could sew for others

– there are many, after all, who do not have the time or the skill to sew their little girls nice dresses. There are girls who would love a beautiful wedding dress, but they are too expensive to buy. Could you make her one? I know dear Christian ladies who do both – perhaps there are ways you could serve with your time, your skill and your sewing machine. Being at home provides the opportunity to imitate the kindness of Dorcas.

Home dressmaking is a skill to preserve, even in a busy world where mass-production has well-nigh extinguished domestic creativity. The opportunities

it gives for making something beautiful, and for serving those you love, are many. I can't help thinking of the Proverbs 31 woman, most definitely a home dressmaker. Of her King Lemuel rightly concluded:

*"Give her the fruit of her hands,
And let her works praise her in
the gates."*

Notes

¹ Jo Ann Janssen and Gwen Ellis, *Dress Like a Million Bucks Without Spending It!* (Fleming H. Revell, Grand Rapids, 2003)

God's secrets – the believer's comforts

Maurice Roberts

God's wisdom is seen both in the way in which he reveals himself and also conceals himself. A perfect economy is exercised by God in the degree of his self-revelation and self-concealment. Just enough of God is revealed to leave us "without excuse" (Rom. 1:20) if we choose to ignore him; and enough is revealed for those who believe in him to be fully assured of him. By this arrangement, God's wisdom has left room for doubt in all who prefer to doubt him, and room enough for sure confidence in all who trust him. God is glorified in this manner, because in this way he places all mankind under a life-long test as to whether we shall trust him or not. The nature of all God's dealings therefore in this life is to place us always in a situation in which we are required to take him on trust. We are on trial in this life in all that we do. Every decision we make is a test of our moral character and indicates, more or less, what we think about God. The friendships we make, the places we go to, the plans we form are all more or less an index of our attitude towards God. Even our inward doubts and fears about situations in life reflect the way we either believe and trust God, or else doubt and distrust him.

Self revelation

God has constructed man's life on earth in this way not accidentally but purposefully, because in this life, all through life, we are on probation. The final Judgment

Day will be the assessment of how we have lived and it will announce to all the world both what we have thought of God and what, as a consequence, we deserve to enjoy, or else suffer, in eternity. The way in which God has chosen most especially to reveal himself is by a spoken and written revelation of his will for our life. Whilst it is perfectly true that something of God is seen and known in the created universe, not enough is known by that means to tell us how to live. The created world is full of evidences of the existence of a great and good Creator. But of itself the created world does not explain how, in detail, I am to live my daily life.

A sure word from God

The glorious sun and sky, the beautiful earth and the expansive sea excite the mind to admiration and delight; but they do not inform me as to how I should live and behave, worship and pray, think and speak. The universe was intended by God to be a general revelation of himself – a startlingly wonderful evidence of his Unseen Being. But the universe does not tell me where I may find this great God that I may love and enjoy him forever. In addition to this general revelation a special, verbal revelation was needed. The first verbal and special revelation of himself which God gave to man, was in the form of a command, giving him permission to eat of all the trees in paradise except one. The penalty for eating of this tree would

be death (Gen. 2:16, 17). Having given to man this revelation of his will, God withdrew and concealed himself. Not only so, but more importantly still, he exposed man to temptation to test his obedience to what had now been said. The form of man's first temptation is full of instruction for us still because temptation always takes this form. Man had a sure word from God. The question was: would he, in the absence of God and under the pressure of Satan's evil suggestion, keep to what God had commanded, or not? It was of course possible for God to have protected man from this temptation or to have greatly reduced the force of the temptation by revealing himself to Adam while Satan presented the temptation. But it was God's will to leave man to face the pressure of Satan's suggestion without the comfortable felt presence of God. The intention on God's part is plain to see. He conceals himself to test man's obedience to the word which has been spoken: "Thou shalt not eat" (Gen. 2:17).

This first temptation is the pattern, or paradigm, of all temptations which we ever face. The main elements are all here: a word from God, pressure from an alien influence to disobey, and a profound moral choice to be faced up to by man. God conceals himself for a time to observe how we shall act in such a situation.

Temptations the same

A moment's reflection will assure us

that this statement is true and accurate. The temptations of all whom we read of in the Bible are the same in form and character. Lot's wife had a word from God: "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee" (Gen. 19:17). But under the weight of her own carnal affections she disobeyed and looked back and so became a pillar of salt. David knew the seventh commandment, but under the power of his own lust, he swept aside all restraint and both sinned and suffered afterwards. So, too, Christ felt the temptation to turn the stones into bread in his hour of hunger. But a perfect obedience to God's revealed will gave him a perfect restraint.

Theory and practice

In all temptations the issue is the same: "Shall I go by the word of a God whom I cannot see or by the word of some other being?" The acutely sharp focus in temptation is on this one thing: "What do I think of God? Is what he has said true? Is there some way round what he has said or must I take him at his word when he is invisible and "far away"? The history of Old Testament Israel and of the New Testament Church is one long, detailed and extended commentary on the first temptation of mankind. In proportion as Israel and its leaders lived by faith in the invisible God whose Book they had in their hands, they were blessed and made progress. In proportion as they allowed other influences to shape their life and conduct, they declined and fell back. Those who are commended in God's Word are said to have "endured as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). Others are held up as a warning in that they "forgot God" (Psa. 106:21). The same is true of the New Testament churches and of ourselves to this day. It is amazing, considering how much light we have on the evil of for-getting God and his Word, how hard we find it to remember God and to live by faith! The theory can be stated in a few words. But the practice we find intensely difficult. Even when we profess to believe in an infallible Bible, we are far from an infallible practice!

Obedience to God

That this is so is a reminder to us of how little we really believe in God or in the Bible. If we fully believed that the unseen eye of a holy God is always upon us, we should care nothing for the praise of men or for their frowns. Perfect faith says that it must obey God

even if it has to displease near friends and family. "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37).

It is for this reason that Christ stated: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). The unbelieving world can tolerate those who will go so far in their practice of religion. But it hates those who put God and his words before all considerations of happiness in this world. The believer does just this because he lives "as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). In this spirit, the young child Jesus said to his mother, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). To upset a loved parent is permissible for duty's sake; to offend God is never permissible for any reason.

Put Christ first

The claims of God are remote to one who thinks of him as little better than a polite fiction. But these same claims are imperative in the conscience of one who remembers who and what God is. It is this factor which explains the paradox of Christ: "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it" (Matt. 10:39). Put Christ first, and the world's easy style of life vanishes at once. The wholehearted Christian becomes dead to many of the common comforts of this life. But he will find heaven at last and all its superior comforts will be his forever. Put yourself first and you may have the name of "Christian", but you will lose your soul. It is the universal rule always.

Fear of God

If all this is so, how can any Christian be happy in this life? If a believer experiences "the loss of all things" (Phil. 3:8) here below, what is the explanation for his present comfort and joy? The answer is in the words: "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him" (Psa. 25:14). Just as God himself is hidden from our eye in this life, so are his inward comforts hidden from the eye of all who are not his people. The believer has from God in this life more joy in his heart than the unbeliever has from all his outward pleasures (Psa. 4:7).

Comforts His secrets

Hidden from the eye and ear of unbelievers but revealed to the soul of those

who love him, God's comforts are his secrets to his children. So the apostle puts the matter: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:9-10). All the doctrines of Scripture bring joy and comfort to a believer in one way or another. The words of the unseen God are a wellspring of joy, a treasury of hope, an encyclopedia of encouragement to him to persevere in the life of faith so that he may "inherit all things" (Rev. 21:7). O what secrets God has revealed to his children! He has shown them how a loving Saviour became "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh" (Eph. 5:30) that he might wash us from guilt and make us his Bride in eternity to come. He has expounded to us the mystery of imputation that we might know how the Christ who "became sin for us" is now "the righteousness of God" to us (2 Cor. 5:21). He has told us of the coming glories of heaven and informed us that a place is even now being prepared for us there. He has revealed to us that though our body be burnt to ashes it will rise again at last in glory, honour and immortality.

Walk by faith

In this world, God has been largely invisible to man. The rule of life in this present world is that we "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). This is the way ordained in this lower world. But it will not be the way we shall live in the world to come, which Christ will introduce at last. There, in the rejuvenated universe, righteousness will be the character of all the redeemed. Not only so, but they shall "see his face", and his "name shall be in their foreheads" (Rev. 22:4).

This beatific vision of God in Christ is the prize which he has throughout the ages revealed in the hearts of all who have loved him. The Bible will not be out of date till that day. Meanwhile, let us strive to walk by it as our only rule "till the day dawn and the day star arise in our hearts" (2 Pet. 1:19).

Mr Maurice Roberts was the editor of the monthly magazine The Banner of Truth. Reprinted with permission The Banner of Truth, issue 450 (March, 2001).

Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings from our bulletins...

The Gleanings from the Bulletins are a wonderful opportunity for us to pray to God. We can use this column to give thanks for His many blessings and to pray for the work of His people spread throughout the Reformed Churches of this land. In Him, Harriet Haverland

QUOTABLE "QUOTES"

"Someone asked 'Will the heathen who have never heard the Gospel be saved?' It is more a question with me whether we – who have the Gospel and fail to give it to those who have not – can be saved." – *Charles Spurgeon*

"Association promotes assimilation. A Christian who lives in isolation from other believers will fail to receive the blessings as well as the maturity resulting from godly interaction." – *Joel R. Beeke*

Are you drifting? "People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated." *DA Carson*.

Are you listening? "As Christians we (rightly!) have high expectations of our pastors as they preach the Word of God. We expect that they will dedicate themselves to studying and understanding the Bible, that they will live lives marked by their commitment to holiness, that they will expend the effort necessary to craft Gospel-centred, Spirit-empowered sermons. In short, we expect that they will come to the pulpit prepared; having dedicated themselves to the task they've

been called to. How odd it is, then, that we are content to have such low standards for our own preparation and own diligence in listening. We expect to turn up at church and be blessed by the preaching of the Word, even while we have expended no effort in seeking to prepare ourselves to hear it and even while we sit passively throughout." *Tim Challies – reviewing Expository Listening by Ken Ramey*.

FROM THE PASTOR

Hastings: David Waldron

Our nation grieves over the loss of 29 lives at the Pike River Mine and our thoughts go out to the families who are struggling to cope with the deep sadness at the loss of loved ones. Unexpected death often causes people to ask: Why? When some Galileans were killed by Pilate's orders in Jerusalem, the Lord Jesus Christ did not disclose the inner workings of God's sovereign providence in this event. However, He did point to the warning which physical death brings to us all: *Luke 13:3 "... unless you repent, you will all likewise perish"*. He then reflected on an accident when the tower of Siloam fell and killed 18 people by repeating the same sober words. The good news about Jesus Christ is that He was entombed in the earth, so that all those who put their faith and trust in Him could share in His victory at the cross and be raised from their graves to eternal life with God in a new heaven and a earth where there will no longer be any death, mourning, crying or pain.

BIRTHS

Bylsma, Lauren Michelle – a daughter born to Luke and Natalie – 20 October (Pukekohe)

Duinkerke, Theresa Porsche Jael – a daughter gifted to Jair and Lauretta – 13 November (Solomon Islands)

Miller, Jonathan Peter – a son born to Andrew and Katrina – 14 November (Oamaru)

Ryan, Jesse Brian – a son born to Jonathan and Esther – 18 November (Pukekohe)

Stephens, Rachel Neeltje Counsell – a daughter born to Jonathan and Lisa – 26 November (Pukekohe)

PROFESSIONS OF FAITH

Bishopdale: Rachael van Wichen

Dovedale: Esbe van Heerden, Hendrik Bakker, Jonathan Holtslag

Foxton: Mark van Echten

Hukanui: Sarah Gibson

Pukekohe: Reaffirmation of Faith – Mrs Lynn Hunter

Wainuiomata: William de Vos, Reuben de Vos

WEDDINGS

13 November – Robert de Rooter and Te Puna Ihimaera James married in Avondale

20 November – Geoffrey Doyle and Elza van der Werff married in Silverstream

27 November – Marcus Balchin and Jenny Bosma married in Bishopdale

27 November – Peter Shin and Youmee Lee married in North Shore

04 December – Caleb Grul and Dianne Wisse married in Hukanui

04 December – Marc Jensen and Tessa Geerlofs married in Palmerston

18 December – Ben Rogers and Teresa Klinkhamer married in Hamilton

DEATHS

Baker, Peter – Please join Trudy and the family/friends as we have a Memorial Service to celebrate the life God has given to our Brother Peter – especially the renewed life he now enjoys in the presence of our God! (Nelson)

Bouter, Gre – The Lord took home our sister after a long illness. Gre was 80 years old. Our sympathy and love go out to her husband Cor and to Caroline and Nico van't Wout and the wider family as they grieve their loss. But they also rejoice, as do we, in the knowledge that Gre is now safely with her Lord. (Hamilton)

Van de Waardt, Maria – Our condolences to Henk and the van de Waardt family at the passing away of Maria. While we rejoice that our sister is with the Lord in glory, our prayers and support remain with the family in their loss. (Palmerston North)

Westerlaken, Leen – As a congregation, we share a common faith in the promises of our God. Thanks be to Him who

gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Please pray for Adrie, Arda, Connie, Bill and for their families as they mourn their loss. (Hastings)

MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

Buckland's Beach: It was decided that it is both wise and necessary to at least maintain the work and input of Br. Jabez Cho in LABS ministry. His work as administrator, encourager and adviser will continue during 2011. He will therefore continue to be supported for 20 hours per week. In YOUTH ministry, the work of Br. Marcus Mulder continues to be good and necessary. The support at 10 hours per week will be retained. Along with that, Marcus has become increasingly involved in ministry at Macleans' College as facilitated by an organisation called 'Young Life'.

Buckland's Beach: Br. Luke Scheepers (son of Rev. Andre Scheepers) is doing his first year of ministerial studies by distance education. Next year, God willing, he and his wife, Danae, hope to move over to Geelong for him to continue studies at the RTC.

Christchurch: We rejoice with Dr. Tim Rott in sustaining his Colloquium Doctum (discussion about His love for and understanding of the Christian faith). It was a delight to be there to hear the discussion. It was a great encouragement to see many of you present for this and I trust it was a blessing to you all. Having spent a couple of weeks here with his wife, Georgette and his daughter, Tiffany, they have returned to the USA where they eagerly await the birth of their first grandchild to their other daughter. God willing, they will return to NZ late January/early Feb-

ruary to take up their labours in His service.

Christchurch: Rev. Crosbie de Kretser and his wife will arrive in Christchurch on 1 January and Rev. de Kretser will supply the Christchurch pulpit for the month of January.

Dunedin: The session has contacted Rev. Dick Wynja and he has expressed a willingness to assist Dunedin again in the new year. Let us continue to pray for our brothers and sisters in Dunedin as they wait for the Lord's provision of a permanent minister.

Masterton: Jan Erik's MARS update: ... "The beginning of the month gave us the excitement of the passing of Erik's Hebrew comprehensive. God is good and we experienced that goodness again. With that comprehensive out of the way the only one that remains is the final oral comprehensive at the end of January. This comprehensive is an oral exam in front of all the professors in which they can ask anything we have studied over the past two and a half years. It is supposed to mirror, in a small way, a presbytery exam that, all candidates for the pastorate receive. So it will probably be a little nerve racking, but very useful, since we will have to go through all our previous work to refresh ourselves. We get the whole month of January off from lectures to study for it, so we have plenty of time to focus."...

Palmerston North: The congregational meeting was well attended and as a result of the very clear vote, the Session will now move towards establishing a calling committee for the purpose of calling a second minister for the work here in PN.

Wainuiomata: Steffen Akkerman, John Haakma and Albert Couperus are currently working through a fairly comprehensive Biblical counselling course in order to be better equipped to serve the Lord and His church. It's encouraging to see how the Lord Jesus continues to provide the necessary spiritual gifts to us for the church to function well. (Eph 4:7-11)

CHURCH BUILDINGS

Bishopdale: On 27 October we met as a congregation to vote on proceeding with a new plan for extending the church buildings. The vote was well in excess of the 75% majority that session was seeking. Praise the Lord for the unity expressed in the meeting. Please

Have you been conscious of **God's call** on your life?

Are you praying for the **right place** to serve Him, with your skills and interests?

For the past twelve years, Rev. Kevin Rietveld and his wife Machi have served the Lord faithfully in **Honiara, Solomon Islands**.

These beautiful, tropical islands are three hours flying from Brisbane, but poor and in need of the Gospel of Jesus.

Machi and Kevin have responded to many requests and challenges, such as: *Teaching, distributing aid, co-ordinating visiting teams of helpers and builders, establishing a prison ministry, broadcasting and publishing, sponsoring school students, training church leaders, caring for the disabled, teaching children in hospital etc.*

With a regular support team, and a functional, comfortable base, they've found this mission work fulfilling and enriching.

They testify to the numerous blessing they've been privileged to share, and receive in return.

God is good!

It is Kevin's intention to retire as **MISSION DIRECTOR** in late 2012.

The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, through its Solomon Islands Mission Workgroup, is seeking applications, and expressions of interest, and would love to hear from **YOU**.

Enquiries can be made to:

KEVIN RIETVELD in Honiara
email: swim@solomon.co.sb

PETER VAN DER SCHOOR in Tasmania
(Chairman, S.I.M. Workgroup)
email: vanderschoor@tassie.net.au
phone +61 03 6229 3331

uphold the Building Committee in prayer as they continue with the various steps that need to be taken to get this project completed.

Hastings: On 28 November, the first worship service in the new building at Howard Street was held following the sale of the church buildings at Florence Street. Thanks be to God for providing us with larger and more suitable facilities for our congregation. Our surroundings today are different and relatively unfamiliar. However, we assemble again this morning to worship the Almighty God who is from everlasting to everlasting. We come to hear the pure Word of God, and to serve our Lord in the local church into which He has brought us together in union and fellowship as a body of Christ.

MISSIONS

Foxton: Wally & Sjannette Hagoort plan to visit our congregation on Monday 28th February 2011 DV to tell of their work in Papua New Guinea. The commencing time will be advised at a later date. We trust that this meeting will be well attended.

Hukanui: Dr Ralph van Dalen and his brother, John, left for Sahiwal (Pakistan) to assist with operations in the Christian hospital for 3-4 weeks. Please remember them in your prayers.

Hukanui Church is holding a Beach Mission at Raglan from the 27th Dec 2010 to 2nd Jan 2011. Please pray for many to hear and respond favourably to the gospel.

Palmerston North: Rev Paul Archbald gave an update on the missionary work in Uganda. The Archbalds had a lot to tell after their recent overseas' trip, which included among other also a substantial visit to Uganda.

North Shore: Marlene van Tonder arrived home safely. We have asked her to speak to us after the morning Worship Service and tell of her work and experiences in Tanzania over the past year.

PRISON MINISTRY

Christchurch: The Prison team lead a service at Christchurch Men's Prison which was attended by 10 men out of a wing of 60. This was a great encouragement to see. Please remember these men in prayer, that the word of the Lord may dwell in their hearts and that they may be a witness in that wing. What a privilege to be able to bring

God's word into the Prison. May this opportunity bear much fruit. We also have a number in our congregation who are involved in Crossroads Bible Institute (CBI) which also shares God's word with Prison Inmates throughout New Zealand. May the Lord bless these efforts.

Dunedin: Each year Prison Fellowship organises the buying of gifts for the children of men who will be in prison at Christmas. Money is raised through donations, mainly from the churches locally, and each child receives a gift that is age-appropriate and suitable for them. Last year, we provided gifts for 120 local children. Angel Tree is a wonderful way to show the love of Christ in a practical way that helps the parent in prison to keep a line of contact open with their child, and helps to make Christmas a time that is more pleasant for the children than it may otherwise be.

Hamilton: Crossroad Bible institute (CBI) reaches out to the 8,500 men and women in NZ prisons with God's truth and God's love. Since 2006, through an in depth correspondence Bible Study Program, almost 900 inmates have studied God's Word. They complete the Bible study lesson in their cell and return it TO the CBI office, which then sends it on to one of the 70 trained volunteers, from all over New Zealand, who act as anonymous instructors and correct the lesson, adding a personal letter of encouragement along as well.

Hastings: Ken Gartner, ex-inmate, author and gospel singer will speak about his life as a prisoner and how the Lord Jesus Christ has impacted his life. In the 60's and 70's Ken was a primary school teacher around Hastings. Ken will have copies of his book, "Dying To Live" for \$30 and his CD "Mountains of Victory" for sale.

ACTIVITIES

Avondale – Cadets & Calvinettes – Short Report

Tomorrow night we will have our final club night for the year. And what a fantastic year it has been! One of the highlights for all the kids was Auckland Presbytery's Big Day Out. Well over a 120 children went ice skating followed by a meal and movie at Bucklands Beach Church. The whole club visited the local fire station in Avondale as part of the Fire Safety Badge practical. The Calvinettes visited Crystal Mountain to learn about rocks and precious stones

for their Geology Badge. The older boys have been making Pinewood Derby cars this year. We're planning on building a track in the not too distant future. These are just a few of the things that have taken place this year. For the Mission badge this year we had the privilege of one of our members who had been to PNG to help with the building of Kiwi Haus, give a talk and slide show. As a fundraiser we had a car boot sale. Many thanks to Counsellors and helpers who have given of their time and gifts teaching and leading our covenant children so that they too may be equipped to become teachers and leaders serving the Lord.

Hamilton and Hukanui: Cadets and Calvinettes PNG Challenge Night – You may have noticed the poster in the hall advertising our PNG challenge night coming up in November. On Monday 15th of November our Cadets and Calvinettes (and counsellors!) will engage in a night of intense physical and mental challenges in order to raise funds for our Papua New Guinean Missionaries in conjunction with our 2010 missions badge. All funds are going towards sponsoring the books and course work for two diploma students (Nawai and Aisi – a sponsorship of \$2,000NZ per student is recommended), sponsoring the medical and emergency fund, and buying mosquito nets to give to those most at risk of malaria (mosquito nets are \$8 each). Challenges will include reconstructing the kokoda trail, coconut cracking, water/fruit or vegetable carrying, house constructing, flax weaving, creating a tribal identity, and a PNG trivia quiz. This will be topped off with indigenous music and indigenous food for supper! The Cadets and Calvinettes all have sponsorship forms for the evening. Please pray for our Reformed missionaries, Wally and Jeanette Hagoort and Alan and Odette Douma, as well as the three diploma students, Nawai, Aisi, Ben and their families.

Hukanui: Olive Branch Ministry Prayer and Support Group – Over some years a group of Christian women have shared books of encouragement vision and hope with each other on various subjects. We would also like to share these with others for encouragement. Feel free to borrow/look at the books, display will be on a table in the hall.

Silverstream & Wainuiomata church youth would like to invite you to a weekend of fun and games this coming February the 25th-26th. We will be

meeting at Silverstream church on the Friday night at any time after 8:00pm for a time of fellowship and an update of what will happen in the exciting weekend ahead. There will be an organised touch rugby tournament and barbeque lunch on the Saturday with a formal dinner to follow. All money fundraised will be donated to the Karma Church in Uganda.

Wellington: Heart Sisters – Many of the ladies in the congregation are currently involved in the Heart Sisters programme. All those involved are invited to come together for a fun night, and to find out “who has who” as their Heart Sister. Please bring along a gift for your Heart Sister, and during the evening you will be giving it to her.

Short Report of the Auckland Presbytery Meeting held 12th November, 2010

The meeting was opened by vicar Craig van Echten on behalf of the calling Church, Bucklands Beach, whereupon the Rev. Michael Willemse took the chair.

A special welcome was extended to the Rev. Peter Moelker of Avondale, attending as a delegate for the first time, and the Rev. Terry Ingleton and Ruling Elder Ken Stevenson of the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia, a denomination of approx 700 souls and eleven

congregations established when the Rev. A Graham Kerr led nearly all of his congregation out of the Presbyterian Church in 1967, because of theological liberalism. These brothers are in NZ for a week visiting some of our churches and also with the Interchurch Relations Committee with a view to seeking sister-church relations with the RCNZ. Later in the evening they gave us a brief historical overview of their churches and their sister churches in Vanuatu/Fiji, a result of missionary work over the years. (They also noted thankfulness for the turn-around in the PCA in more recent years; yet, the Declaratory Act, which allowed the liberalism to flourish earlier, as in the PCANZ also, remains.)

The Church Order, Article 47 questions were asked of the Pukekohe and Avondale congregations. A few points of interest: Pukekohe plans to teach the evangelism course, “Let’s Just Start Talking,” put out by **Christians in the Media**, next year, hopefully to the whole congregation; there have been six weddings, six baptisms and six public professions of faith in the past year; building plans are still in process; the ex-Mangere members have settled into the congregation well. Bro. Deon Snyders of Bucklands Beach then led the meeting in prayer for the Pukekohe congregation. Avondale is very thankful finally to have their own minister who has begun taking the session through Sittima’s book, *With a Shepherd’s Heart*, at session meetings; and an Adult Education class before the Sunday morning worship service. The evening service is now held at 6pm to encourage younger families to attend. Christian education is well supported, with Immanuel Christian School sharing the property and a fund administered by the deacons to help parents with financial constraints; there is also a growing number of home-schooling families in the congregation. The church seeks to be active in mission, supporting the various denominational missionaries; as well, a team goes down Auckland’s Queen St to do street evangelism every third Friday night.

Other matters: The men’s Presbytery Study Day for 2011 will be organised by the Pukekohe Congregation. A letter was received from Luke Scheepers seeking assistance with funding his student fees at the RTC next year. It was suggested that he direct his request to the denominational Student Assistance Fund. Bucklands Beach submitted two songs for use in public worship:

2011 WELLINGTON LADIES PRESBYTERIAL

PRESSING THE RIGHT BUTTONS

Are you driven nuts by someone who can’t make up their mind?

Or exasperated by someone’s need to get it right and perfect, every time!

Perhaps you have in your life a “Show pony” that keeps horsing around, even before they talk!..

Or you feel short-changed as the most “outspoken” person gets what they want every time.

Those ‘weird’ people that you want to sort out, are the very same people who want to sort you out!

Perhaps they’re not Weird, but Wired a certain way.



Allie Mooney, CSP
People Interpreter

Come along for a fun and entertaining morning with NZ’s highly acclaimed and award-winning speaker Allison Mooney.

She will give you insight on how to get along with people that are different from you.

“Different but not wrong, just different”.

You will see how to truly enrich the partnerships with your spouse, children, friends, workmates and all of those you come in contact with – all in a simple, unique and fun way.

Get ready for some fun and “great take home”.

Come and join us at the 2011 Wellington Ladies Presbyterial for a day of fun, fellowship and most of all laughter.

Mark your calendar now and be sure to be there.

When: 19th March 2011

Where: Te Awahou Hall, 79 Main Street, Foxton

“Let us not give up meeting together, ... but let us encourage one another...”
Heb 10:25

"Give thanks with a grateful heart," and "Worthy is the Lamb." These were approved. Church Visitation reports were received for various congregations; yours truly reported on two *colloquium docta* he had attended in recent months; Bro. Pieter vander Wel was reappointed, with hearty thanks, as stated clerk of Presbytery; advice was given in response to a question from the Hamilton congregation; and that is the way it was in November in the Auckland Presbytery.

John Rogers

Short Report of the Wellington Presbytery Meeting held 13th November, 2010

Pieter van Huyssteen, the moderator, opened the meeting with a reading from Matthew 9:1-8, and invited the delegates to join with him in singing Psalm 32. The new Presbytery clerk, John Holt-slag, was welcomed to his first meeting and thanked for his willingness to accept the invitation to serve as Clerk. Church Order Article 47 questions were asked of the Foxton, Wellington and Palmerston North delegates, and prayer was offered for each congregation. Paul Archbald and Andrew Nugteren were appointed to draft a letter in response to a letter of concern received from the West Australia Classis.

An intention to appeal against a decision of his session was received from a member of the Wainuiomata congregation. It was proposed that, if possible, the appeal be heard in conjunction with the next meeting of the presbytery. The minutes of the various [Australian] classes and [New Zealand] presbyteries were scrutinised by the Palmerston North session. Reports were received from the Presbytery Youth Liaison Officer and the representative of the Overseas Mission Board.

The Palmerston North delegates reported enthusiastically on plans for a Summer School in Theology to be held over the Wellington Anniversary weekend (20-25 January 2011). A group investigating support for members of our churches who cannot care for themselves on their own was received. The Presbytery agreed to meet on March 4th to conduct the preliminary examination of Vicar Iwan Baaman.

The Presbytery then went into closed session and appointed a committee to draft a response to the concerns expressed in the appeal from the Reformed Church of Palmerston North.

Andrew Nugteren

Short Report of the Christchurch Presbytery Meeting on 5-6 November 2010

The Presbytery delegates gathered on the Friday evening for a *colloquium doctum*. The candidate was the minister-elect of the Reformed Church of Christchurch, Dr Tim Rott, presently a member of the Presbyterian Church of America. With joy and thankfulness his responses to the learned discussion were sustained. The congregation and the Presbytery look forward to welcoming Dr Rott to New Zealand in the new year.

On Saturday morning the Rev Bruce

Hoyt opened the meeting with a reading from Haggai 2:1-9, noting the encouragement for the returning exiles in the rebuilding of God's house, and the ways that encouragement translates to God's people today as his Church continues to be built.

Twelve songs that had been submitted by the Reformed Church of Bishopdale for use in public worship in the Presbytery were approved.

The Rev Robert van Wichen then chaired the remainder of the meeting. A revision of the presbytery rules was referred to an ad hoc committee for finalising and submission to the next meeting.

Reports were received from the Overseas Mission Board and Reformed Theological College representatives. Reports from churches with vacant pulpits and church visitations were received and discussed.

Reports from the organising committees for the forthcoming National Youth Camp and Synod 2011 were received with thankfulness at the progress being made.

John van Dyk

You are invited to the 17th Hamilton Easter Convention

22nd-23rd April 2011

Theme:

Our Love Affair with Dutch Flowers Studies in the Doctrines of Grace

Speaker: REV. JOHN WESTENDORP

(Associate Minister at CRCA Toowoomba, Queensland)

Convention Venue: Hamilton Reformed Church
9 Aberdeen Drive Dinsdale, Hamilton

Meeting Times:

Fri 3.00 & 7.00 pm Sat 10.30 am, 1.00 pm & 3.00 pm

Convention addresses:

Friday	3.00pm 7.00pm	Total ...? Are we really so bad? Election with no strings attached For whom did Christ really die? When resistance is futile Once saved always saved
Saturday	10.30am 1.00pm 3.00pm	

Conference attendance is free, but could you please register closer to the time if you are coming, so we know how many people to expect, esp. for catering purposes.

Afternoon tea and supper will be provided as well as a light evening meal on Friday and lunch on Saturday for those who register for this. There is a small charge for the meals.

A bookstall will operate on Friday and Saturday

A crèche will not be available

Inquiries: Pieter van der Wel, ph. 07-853 3144, e-mail ecap2011@gmail.com

Should there be A.C.C.E.S.S after C.A.R.E.?

Picture it: 30 kids aged between 6 and 10, absolutely keen to spend two hours after school for **more** school! No desks – just their knees on which to place tatty-looking exercise books. Light? Well, there's nothing like a street light under which to meet. Why? Because their illiterate parents can't tutor them. Because the government schools are poorly equipped, staffed and simply not achieving their goals.

What an opportunity! Fighting illiteracy and all of the associated social disadvantages plus an opportunity to provide basic personal health and hygiene instruction. Most of all, Gospel input! Not just foundational Bible stories, but also a solid presentation of a Christian world-and-life view in the middle of a Hindu culture!

That's A.C.C.E.S.S. in Southern India (Tamil Nadu).

* * *

For some years our churches in New Zealand supported the work and ministry of 'C.A.R.E.' (Centre for AIDS Rehabilitation and Education) in India. We were asked to focus on funding for one of the four C.A.R.E. projects, the work in Chennai run by Dr Chanthi.¹ Our contribution towards this ministry proved to be both valuable and effective.

However, in December of 2009 the

National Diaconate Committee (NDC) was informed that our support for this work was no longer needed. Funding is now received for this work from an organization called 'Help a Child India' (HACI) which is financed by the Dutch organisation, *Redt Een Kind* (REK).

We were asked to explore an alternative that is being developed alongside and as a result of the C.A.R.E. project. This project is known as ACCESS (Advanced Children's Christian Education Support Service).

The ACCESS project focuses mainly on the children in rural India, specifically from villages and families who have been contacted, helped and supported via the C.A.R.E. programme.

The questions that challenge those involved, including our churches, is simple but profound: **Will these children fall into the same trap as their parents? What will happen to them? Can this cycle be broken? How? What is needed? If left as they are, what will happen to them?**

My brief: find out more about this project. Speak to those involved. Explore if, why and how our churches could or should be involved. Is it a work that our churches could support via the National Diaconate Committee and the mandate under which it operates?

The key contact person here is Mr

Paulus Samuel, the director of an organisation called the Vocational Training and Rehabilitation Centre (VTRC). The C.A.R.E. projects were established by him during the height of the AIDS crisis. Mr Samuel has become deeply involved in this issue as a consultant with the Indian government as well. His concern is not simply helping those who are HIV positive, but also with the thousands of children of these sufferers. As he sees it, the solution is not just treatment, but a matter of addressing root causes. One of those root causes is the situation in which millions of India's rural children find themselves.

What?

Mr Samuel points to some staggering facts about the education of India's children. By the age of 10 some 39% of India's children are no longer at school. There are vast differences within India's states and between social groups. Very low rates of enrolment are reported for socially disadvantaged groups (scheduled castes and scheduled tribes) with 50% of scheduled caste and 56% of scheduled tribe children dropping out of school. It was shown that in 2000-2001 (the latest government records available) 39.7% of the boys who enrolled in schools dropped out and that it was 41.9% for girls.



A class of children sitting outside a teacher's home.



Paulus Samuel

At present a huge proportion of these children live in rural situations. However, it is projected that by 2020, 80% of the Indian population will be urbanised. Many of those moving into the cities are illiterate² and have little chance of finding gainful employment in this setting. Furthermore, it is this huge, illiterate newly-urbanised uneducated underclass that is most prone to diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

Paulus Samuel writes:

*VTRC, a Christian non-profit organisation since its inception from 1986, has been involved in child development activities through its education wing **Peniel** with a special thrust on educating children from difficult backgrounds through its Peniel Rescue Home and schools. Recently, from June of 2007, Peniel Rural College was founded to train 100 graduates as recognized teachers to be able to teach in schools thereby impacting the quality of education in the region. Peniel Education College is poised to impart these teachers with Christian education and counselling training as an add-on course so that these teachers in turn can become change agents in their respective schools where they will teach and in their own community as well.*

On the other hand VTRC responded through its health care wing Centre for AIDS Rehabilitation and Education (CARE) to the HIV & AIDS situation in Tamil Nadu in the year 1994 and since then has become a demonstration centre and a learning platform for East Asian NGO's who would like to take up community based care and support programs with regard to HIV and AIDS. Through its various outreach, care and support programs CARE reaches out to 5000 patients from about 1300 villages.³

How?

While in India Paulus Samuel encouraged us to visit and inspect a number of ACCESS centres in the Madurai area. We visited three – two operational and one potential site.

As we walked through one of the villages and peered into the state-funded school, we experienced a sinking feeling. The teacher was not yet there. Late!



There was little evidence of a structured programme. Add to that the reality that the parents of these children are mostly illiterate themselves, and is it any wonder that these kids themselves learn little, drop out and are doomed to repeat the experiences of their parents?

'ACCESS' is all about taking these village children after school and tutoring, mentoring and helping them. A group of 30 children (the maximum number per supervisor) meet together for 2 hours after school and into the evening. They meet where there is light (outside a teacher's house, in the village street under a lamppost, etc) and bring their homework. Their work is completed under the supervision of a trained teacher. They are given elementary instruction on hygiene. Alongside of that the programme presents the Christian message – not simply the message of salvation in Christ, but also a conscious attempt to articulate and teach a Christian world-and-life view. The Christian world-and-life view is designed to challenge and transform their way of thinking, looking at the world, understanding sexuality, family, work, etc. In short: lay a new foundation that is Christian and prepare them for life according to God's purpose and plan.

Does it work?

Meeting these kids was quite an experience. They regard these ACCESS programmes as a very, very special privilege. They value what they are learning and were absolutely keen to show us what they were up to, language and cultural barriers notwithstanding. We saw their homework books. We saw pictures of

the (Bible) stories they were being told. We saw their growing sense of pride in their personal appearance. In a nutshell we saw **hope** centred ultimately on the person and work of Christ. Check out some of the photographs.

The challenge

As I write these words, the NDC has **not** made any commitment to this programme. The difficulty is that this is primarily an **educational** rather than a **diaconal** project. However, this distinction is increasingly blurred. So often what begins as a purely diaconal project dealing with physical needs (HIV, leprosy, loss of property because of natural disasters) sooner or later confronts us with the real causes that give rise to them. Those causes are spiritual. Such spiritual causes can only be addressed through a Word ministry that grows alongside of and out of the initial deed (diaconal) ministry. The ACCESS programme is an example of exactly that.

Should our churches become involved? Is the NDC the body to address this?

These are the questions that we as churches, and especially the deacons, are asked to consider.

Dirk J van Garderen

(National Diaconate Committee)

1 Articles on this work were published in *Faith in Focus* in June/July 2007.

2 A recent report showed that 44% of children between the ages of 7 and 10 could not read even a simple paragraph.

3 A fuller version of this statement is included in the Appendix. Please check it out carefully.



The ACCESS project focuses mainly on the children in rural India, supported via the C.A.R.E. programme.

APPENDIX

For the sake of brevity and clarity, I have taken the liberty of using only a very brief quotation of the Paulus Samuel report. For anyone interested, the full version of this report is available from the author of this article.

It is also useful to look at the longer version of the quotation which continues as follows:

With the given above situation on school drop outs and the experience and structures VTRC has in the field of education (schools and teacher education college) and the community presence (working in 1300 villages through the HIV ministry and has networked with a number of churches and also a high number of colleges.) it has led the VTRC think tank to come up with the proposal described below for a sustainable low cost, high volume, community based holistic education response to the above problem of school drop outs with a special focus on communities in the rural parts of Tamil Nadu, India.

Goal: To enable childhood for children in rural villages with a holistic education support system to ensure continued schooling and prevent child labor and child marriages.

Target Population: Children between the ages of 5-15.

Location: Villages in rural parts covering 15 districts around Madurai and Dharmapuri of Tamil Nadu.

Key Principles and thrust areas:

1. Low cost per unit (child) leading to-High Volume outreach.
2. Local people participation in terms of providing place for the centre to run.
3. Local stakeholders such as church participation in identifying the possible volunteer who will be trained to be the teacher at the centre.
4. Involvement of higher education institutions for standardising and training the teacher's inputs. (Peniel Teachers College)
5. Holistic Christian perspective/outlook on education and development of the child.

Aims of the Project

1. To provide an opportunity for children in villages to have continued holistic education.
2. To make the parents aware of the importance of education and child rearing practices.
3. To link up with local schools and facilitate the continued education and follow up of the target population.

Project Objectives

1. To increase actual completion rate (ACR) from 55% to 90% among rural children in the age of 5-10 years of 960 ACCESS centres in 1300 villages of 15 districts around Madurai and Dharmapuri by 2013.
2. To increase completion rate from 65% to 85% in middle school.
3. To increase completion rate from 67.9% to 80% in high school.
4. To ensure improved performance in school education with holistic education modules
5. To establish around 48 satellite schools for a maximum of 20 ACCESS centres for each in the 1300 villages of 15 districts around Madurai and Dharmapuri by 2010.