

faith in focus

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AND GOD SAID,
"LET THE WATER TEEM WITH LIVING CREATURES,
AND LET BIRDS FLY ABOVE THE EARTH
ACROSS THE EXPANSE OF THE SKY."

GENESIS 1:20

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Editorial

One of our folk in Mangere passed on to me an article which appeared in *The Listener* just before Christmas last year. Entitled 'Repackaging Jesus', it showed how widely churches in New Zealand have been looking for a 'user friendly' approach to attract more people into churches. Christmas was raised as a key time of the year to market one's local church. The article brought out how extensively this approach is being used. But it also quoted voices who wondered if it wasn't a dumbing-down of the gospel message. Dr. Peter Lineham of Massey University felt that as the Church turns its well-groomed, welcoming face to the world, it risks not asking the hard questions or taking a stand. He went on, "Jesus, then, is presented as sweet and cuddly. Where are the challenges and the demands for justice?"

Does Lineham have a point? Has Jesus become a type of Santa, all too ready to excuse the sin and give the present anyway? There was a discordant voice to his, though. One clergyman felt the modern church had stopped watering down the message. But has it? People visiting many of these churches notice that a high proportion of the congregation do not have a Bible with them. Then there is the way the pastors skips from one Bible version to another in the course of his message, all flashed up on the huge screen. And as for the message itself, it would come more in the self-help, motivational-type addresses — a la Anthony Robbins. To quote Lineham again, "The booming churches are very carefully marketed, and what they're marketing is a feeling. Feeling good about yourself and self affirmation."

That's not really the 'evangel' is it? That's not the good news which has to be first of all bad news for those apart from God. And while there are no excuses for not being an open, welcoming church, there are no excuses either for not preaching the Gospel. For this reason it is good that visitors to our churches from other churches may find us too heavy. It's good that they find our approach to church membership almost sectarian—because we do practice discipline. It's good too that we have a guarded Lord's Supper table. For the very Gospel that communion remembers means that Jesus regards His Church very seriously. Look at the price He paid!

If all this means that conservative Reformed Presbyterian churches in this nation are seen to be even further away from other evangelical churches, that's all to the good. But if it means we are tempted to go their way—whether with the type of music, the peppy-type messages, the radically re-named and re-structured church clubs, groups and other parts of church life, and the whole casual laid-back seeker-sensitive atmosphere—then we've really lost it. As several pentecostal pastors have shared with me, you'll have plenty of competition then. In one New Zealand town the six pentecostal groups have been sheep-stealing for many years. Each time one gets the latest in up-beat ecclesiastical trends, it's a swapping all over again!

Being a biblical church has never been flavour-of-the-month. Only a very few times in church history, for short periods and in certain places, can one say there has been a definite Calvinistic influence in Christendom and in society. But the idea of a faithful remnant is scriptural and it's only as we keep to God's Word that we will be a strong witness—even if that is simply by being different from other churches who are chasing after this world!

*“However, when the Son of Man comes,
will he find faith on the earth?”*

Luke 18:8b

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

The shadow falls

The beginning of the end in Luke 9:51-56

Sjirk Bajema

Think of a particularly difficult time in your Christian life. Then the real job was at hand! What you had always been expecting to strike you sometime hit you really hard! There had never been any doubt that it would come. And it did! And it could be even worse tomorrow!

Does that thought frighten you? Knowing that you must yet suffer before glory—is that going to make you give up on faith altogether? Of course not! Weak though we are, there's yet determination! So we can know a little of what our Lord feels in Luke 9, verse 51. When it says "*Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem*" we can relate to it.

But when Luke writes this he's especially speaking of something far beyond what we can know or experience. In fact, here there's a sudden acceleration in his Gospel. It is something we find in all the three synoptic gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke. What they all turn to here is what's really at the heart of the Gospel. We actually enter into the heart of Christ's doing and dying—the crux of the whole writing!

In Luke it even seems as if what's been written so far is an introduction—a prologue—to the important action. The way that he would have written his gospel in the 1st century supports this thought, because everything then was written on scrolls.

Now, scrolls could only be opened one way. It wasn't possible to quickly flick through the pages, and get to the best parts. You had to open it from the beginning. It had to be wound through.

So there was always a prologue—an introduction—which set the scene. This would have taken up the first scroll in a set. That part is where the credentials and ministry of Christ is shown. Thus far it has been proved who He is.

Here the Lord is setting out

Now comes the part about what He has to do. This is the heart of the matter. For the Son of God begins the hardest part of being obedient to His Father's will. Everything now becomes focused on the goal of His being here. The time is right.

God, after all, doesn't make mistakes, does He? And though the men and women around Christ understand very little yet Jesus focuses His all on this final trip. He is going this time exactly so that He would die to save His people.

This is stated in John 12:44-46, where it says: "*Then Jesus cried out, 'When a man*

believes in me, he doesn't believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.'"

What we see here is no fatalistic acceptance of the inevitable. Jesus knew **who** He was doing it for. In His mind's eye He could see the vast multitudes that heaven would one day contain. Upon His heart was the deepest love for hundreds of thousands who depended for eternity on what these next few weeks would bring!

It was a burden which would make His sweat flow like drops of blood. It was the

choice that would turn His disciples away from Him. One of them would even betray Him! It was the way which could only end on that cursed cross—despised by men and rejected by God! Yet He, of all men, knew exactly what He was letting Himself in for.

Each step is pre-planned; every metre closer to Jerusalem brings home to the Lord His supreme sacrifice. What a cost we were to Him who paid it all! Isaiah had prophesied exactly how it would be in chapter 53 verse 7, "*He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he didn't open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.*"





This is the most immense strength! No power can compare with the simple heart submitted to the will of his Heavenly Father.

There is an attempted turnabout

Though, even with such resolve, the evil, despicable, serpent lies waiting still. How desperately Satan struggled to detour Jesus from the greatest of all destinations! How he threw all he could at stopping this journey!

The devil attacks! For we see, in verse 52 and 53, when the messengers of the Lord go into a Samaritan village to get things ready for Him, they weren't welcome.

"Ah," we say, "that's because of the centuries-long hostility between the two races! They should have expected to be treated this way!"

That explanation doesn't fit, though. The messengers must have gone into that village on a common understanding of being able to be received. No one is in a hurry to walk into a hostile situation. The Samaritans were certainly aware of who Jesus was. Those there would have been aware of how He had interacted with their people before. And certainly they knew about His miracles!

Actually, in their selfishness, that's what they wanted. "Give me! Give me!" is what they were saying. They wanted to be entertained. That's what they demanded of Jesus.

But our Lord wasn't preaching or doing wonders on this trip. It was a simple overnight stay on His way to Jerusalem.

That was something those locals didn't know about, though. All that concerned them was the disappointment that there would be nothing to see this time.

I suppose it would have been something like being prepared to see a famous performer, and suddenly the show is cancelled. Perhaps he's been unwell.

Whatever the reason, there's anger. People can become unreasonable. Though isn't that only because they didn't have their pleasure?

This anger was especially focused on the Lord, more than any inter-racial disharmony. Already His rejection had begun in intensity. Jesus wasn't worshipping at the altar of their god! How dare He!

They simply couldn't see. It was the same tragedy with the Jews. We read of it in John 12:37: "*Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they will wouldn't believe in him.*" Though there it also showed the fulfilment of prophecy, for these things showed Jesus to be who He said He was! There would be no one else those Samaritans were treating the same harsh way, for this was showing what God's Son had to go through.

Not that they would admit it, of course! Yet in faith we see it to be so. And it was in reference to that unbelief that in John 12 Jesus quotes Isaiah. As we read there in the verses 40 and 41, "*He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so that they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them.*" Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about Him."

But He will continue throughout

This was no set-back! Jesus Christ has purposed to save His people. So that's exactly what He will do! Much as Satan desperately tries to stop Him now, knowing He doesn't have much time because of the prophecies all being fulfilled, yet Jesus has been planning and working for a lot longer. When the text says, "*Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem,*" there's no shadow of turning with Him.

This is the greatest comfort and most sure hope! It can keep you right through your life

on this earth and bring you to heaven when you die. Even when James and John try to prove the Lord right by their suggested punishment in verse 54, Jesus won't be distracted from what is this time His **saving** mission!

The 'sons of thunder', as James and John were also called, lived up to that name. It was that impulsiveness which showed their misdirection. That's why they asked, "Lord, do you want to call down fire from heaven to destroy them?"

In the footnote in our N.I.V.'s it adds that they said, "*even as Elijah did.*" But despite whether they said that or not, they didn't ask the Lord for the same reason that Elijah did, for the prophet, as 2 Kings chapter 1 records, did it when the Gospel had been rejected.

If the Gospel had been most important in those disciple's minds they would have realised how little the Gospel had been preached to the Samaritans. And how much of a witness had the Jews been to Samaritans with their self-pride?

Indeed, that's why James and John asked the Lord to do that terrible thing. It was because their pride had been hurt. So Jesus tells them off quite definitively. Two wrongs don't make a right!

At this point the footnote helps us again. For they had to realise why the Lord was here! The Son of Man had come to save lives this time. That was going to be a hard lesson for them. In the end they would be changed by the Spirit's work **alone** to become the foundation of the New Testament Church. And how much weren't they learning about that right now!

Patience. It will be provided. And don't they go to another village? This is no end in itself. At most it's a valuable way to understand the end better.

How are you turning out?

Though, can I ask you, is that what it is for you? Is your life in the Lord being set out? Are you growing in the way He had to go? Have you found yourself being joined to Him more and more?

Think about those things that used to take up so much of your time. You know, those things that you so much like to do. But the things you know that so much take up your time leave the Lord with no time. Haven't they been replaced with healthy Christian fellowship, family time, good reading, enjoying God's creation? And aren't you now so thankful that God has been so good to you in the past? He's taken us through quite a lot!

It wasn't always easy—sometimes you almost despaired of your very faith itself—but He was working it for the good. That's why the personification of God we see in the text, Jesus Christ the Saviour, is **the good!** His suffering and death tore away all that

stood between the communion we have right now.

Or have I got you wrong? If anything, you're not happy at all right now. It's not going your way so you don't want to know. Those Samaritans had the right idea. Just keep Jesus out of the place!

Then I pray for you that this Easter you

would meet the true Christ. And then may you be buried with Jesus in your sin so that He rises in your own heart, too! Don't delay. He's coming back very soon. And that won't be like the journey He took then for the purpose of saving the world.

You might be the impulsive Christian, though. Like James and John you find it's

not working out they way you'd like it to. Well, this Easter holds a message for you, too. You walk with Jesus; you talk to Jesus; and you listen to Jesus.

What we realise this Easter might be a harsh telling-off for us. But it will certainly be for our good. After all, isn't Jesus **the good**?

God's gift of pain

Another way of seeing what the Saviour went through

Hans Voschezang

When we discuss amongst ourselves the subject of pain, it seems nobody really wants to talk about it, except complaining how bad it has been or how unpleasant pain is. Despite the obvious protective value of millions of warning sensors, the pain network is the most unappreciated bodily system. It attracts abuse and bad feelings. I've never read a poem or hymn dedicated to pain.

We, as Christians who believe in a loving Creator God, don't really know how to interpret pain or how to deal with the problem of pain. If we are honest with ourselves, deep down we secretly may even confess that it was God's one mistake, creating pain. Could He not have worked out a better way or a device for us to cope with pain? Now, I'm convinced that pain gets a bad press.

Closer up

In a close-up, under a microscope, we see the pain network in a totally different light. Why does the human body need pain? When I'm hurting, what is my body telling me? Pain serves some useful biological purposes, which bear the hallmark of the Divine Creator Genius.

Consider our skin, a flexible and tough organ stretching over the body frame as an advance guard to protect us against the dangers of the outside world. Millions upon millions of pain sensors dot the surface of the skin, scattered in a precise order in harmony with the body's specific needs. Every part of the body has unique sensitivity to both pain and pressure, depending on its function.

The face, in particular in the area of the lips and nose, is acutely sensitive to both. The eye has certain rigid requirements of structure; it is exposed on the surface. An eye must be transparent for obvious reasons, which severely limit the blood supply. Blood vessels would block the eye's vision. Any intrusion causes danger, since a blood-starved eye cannot easily repair itself.

Therefore a well-designed pain sensor

system makes the eye incredibly sensitive to the slightest pressure or pain. Have you ever wondered why you blink? Blinking functions like your car's windscreen-wipers, washing away the dirt. It is the pain that causes you to blink. To prove my point, try not to blink for a while. Your eyes will start to sting and you must blink to alleviate the pain.

The fingertips are unusual, however. Their constant use requires them to be sensitive to pressure and temperature, but they are somewhat pain-resistant. It's just like a loomtuner in the weaving mill, who can feel the slightest difference between two identical pieces of cloth woven side by side on two different looms. He can make the necessary adjustments to the loom so that both pieces of cloth feel exactly the same in quality.

Medical libraries contain hundreds of massive volumes of books written about the amazing facts of the body's pain network. Pain reveals God's marvelous design, and it serves our bodies well. Thank God for the gift of pain! Without pain, our lives are in

grave danger and devoid of many basic pleasures.

A team of medical engineers received millions of dollars in grants for the sole purpose of designing an artificial pain system. People with diseases such as leprosy and severe forms of diabetes were in great danger of losing fingers, toes or entire limbs, simply because their warning system of feeling pain had been silenced. Perhaps they could design a substitute system that would alert them to the worst dangers. This team of three professors in Electronic Engineering, a Bio-engineer and several Bio-chemists developed a kind of artificial nerve system that could be worn on the finger like a glove. When subjected to pressure, the artificial nerve would set off a warning signal.

The team was confronted with a daunting task. The more they studied the nerve system in the body, the more complex their task became. The nerve cells change their perception of pain to meet the body's need. The pressure of inflammation, for example,



It would have been thorns like these the Saviour wore.

on a infected finger becomes ten times more sensitive to pain. That's why a swollen throbbing finger feels awkward and in the way. The body is telling you to give it time to heal.

Unable to be copied

Nerve cells "turn up" the volume amplifying bumps, scrapes and bruises that otherwise would go unnoticed. In no way could these scientists duplicate this feat with the current available technology. They came away appreciating the remarkable engineering of the body's pain network, including several hundred million sensors that function maintenance-free throughout a person's lifetime.

After five years—thousands of man-hours and millions of dollars—they abandoned the project. A warning system suitable just for one hand was exorbitantly expensive, subject to frequent mechanical failure and hopelessly inadequate to interpret the profusion of sensations.

A system sometimes called "God's great mistake" was far too complex for even the most sophisticated technology to mimic. With today's computer technology available, there is not a computer powerful enough to process the trillions of signals to the brain in a speed faster than the speed of light. By definition pain is unpleasant. It forces you to withdraw your fingers from a stove; yet this quality saves us from destruction. Unless the warning signal demands a response, we might not heed it. Pain will "whisper" to us subconsciously in the early stages of damage; we feel uncomfortable and restless in our sleep. Pain will "speak" to us as danger increases; a hand grows tender and sore after a long time raking leaves in the garden. Pain will "shout" at us when the danger becomes severe; blisters and tissue damage force us to stop raking leaves.

The value of pain

So, what happens when you don't feel pain? As I mentioned before, a leprosy patient does not feel any pain because the nerve endings have died. Severe diabetes and alcoholism can also cause stop people feeling pain.

One day a leprosy patient was allowed to go home on leave for several weeks from the Leprosarium in Valore, India, to spend some time with his family. On his way home, a distance of about 20 km, he got a sharp stone in his sandal which embedded itself in his foot. Because he didn't feel any pain, this stone worked itself up so that the bones and surrounding area badly got infected. By the time he came back to the Leprosarium, gangrene had already set in, and surgical removal of his foot above the ankle became necessary to save his life.

Listen to your pain! We take an aspirin at

the slightest discomfort to silence pain, but in doing so we deal only with the symptoms. We try hard to shut down pain if we can.

The TV ads of pharmaceutical companies praise the virtues of all sorts of painkillers, promising relief. People in the USA consume more than 30.000 tons of aspirin a year, according to the 1997 statistics. North America is only 5% of the world population, but consumes over 50% of all manufactured drugs. One third of these work on the central nerve system. The USA is the most advanced society in the world in terms of suppressing pain. We forget however, that the more we try to shut down pain the more pain will strike back. When we refuse to listen to the pain in our bodies, we invariably destroy ourselves. Pain is a gift from God, but it is a gift nobody wants.

A gift nobody wants

But, we are not alone in our pain and suffering. Isaiah described it very accurately in chapter 53:3. "*He was...a man of sorrow and familiar with suffering...and by His wounds we are healed.*"

Why did Isaiah predict that this world's ugliness had to be laid on the Christ as the only way to make things right again? In short, how does Jesus' pain and suffering relate to you and me?

In asking these questions, we enter a realm fraught with misery. How was God able to create the entire cosmos only with the power of His spoken word, while the salvaging of that creation-run-amok took so much longer and involved so much Divine labour and suffering? We cannot get our questions answered, but the fact is that the Son of God takes to Himself the brokenness of life. He reversed the course of everything that contributed to this fractured reality in the first place.

We have to believe that this was the only way. We have to believe that this way alone works, because ours is a world of pain and suffering that needs to be met head-on.

An illustration

I heard a little story from Arie van der Veer, the minister of the Dutch EO (a Dutch Christian evangelism organisation). A mother brought her daughter to the hospital for surgery. She asked the surgeon if she could stay with her daughter during the operation. The surgeon pointed out to her that it would be a scene not for the faint-hearted and asked if she could handle that. But the mother insisted on being with her daughter. Than the surgeon said to her, "Okay, you can come, but you must be very calm and quiet." So, the operation proceeded as planned, and afterwards the surgeon asked her what kind of impression this operation had left on her. She confessed that she had felt every move of the scalpel herself. You

see, that's mother love speaking here. Who can imagine the anguish and pain of this mother? It must include the idea that just such anguish is inside the soul of God's only Son. That very specific pain and grief has been taken on by Jesus.

We suffer because this world derailed long ago. There is something about the nature of our pain and suffering that requires God not to stand back at a distance. He must enter it, be part of it. We read the stories in the newspapers. A car bomb explodes, and the smoke clears. A father sees a piece of his child's body; another piece over there! Who can describe the agony and anguish the father must suffer? Only God can heal him from the inside. God knows about a grandfather who used to play with his grandchildren in the backyard, but now can no longer raise a spoon to his lips, because of a crippling disease. This humiliates him. But God is there, so He can enter it and reverse it from a position of knowing compassion.

God hates the pain that tears at minds He created in His own image. God hates the cancers that eat away the flesh He so lovingly created. Who goes to a hospital and witnesses a hip-fractured patient grimacing in pain as a therapist forces her to put weight on that broken piece of anatomy and thinks, "Well, that may happen to me one day, but that's just fine." We look at what we dislike, what we despise, what we fear, and we go the other way. We pray that nothing like this will happen to us. We may call that even a "natural reaction", and perhaps it is. But maybe that is also why it took a supernatural reaction from God to save His people. God entered our pain and suffering and triumphed over it. We are not saved by power but by weakness. God understood our pain. He knows our sorrows in minute detail, and understands the sufferings that sin has brought to every last person of this broken world.

And because God in Christ knows that, He has made it possible to one day to wipe away every tear from our eyes. The bread and wine at His table reminds us of that. Because Jesus suffered for us to the very last breath, the day will come when He will say to each one of His own, "*My son, My daughter, enter into the glory of My Father's Kingdom.*" And that will be enough for all eternity.

For further reading

'Because it matters', by Dr Scott Hoezee; 'Why is pain necessary?' www.intouch.org (Taken from: Where is God when it hurts) 'Pain: The gift nobody wants' by: Ed Hird; and 'Pain' by: Dr Paul Brand. Additional recommended books on the subject of pain and suffering by Joni Eareckson - Tada are: "When God Weeps"; "The God I Love" and "A Step Further"

World in focus

Declaration of Independence banned at Californian school

Steven Williams, a fifth-grade teacher in the San Francisco Bay area suburb of Cupertino, has sued for discrimination, claiming he was singled out for censorship by principal Patricia Vidmar because he is a Christian. Williams asserts that he has been required to submit all of his lesson plans to Vidmar for approval, and that she will not permit him to use any that contain references to God or Christianity. Among the materials she has rejected are excerpts from the Declaration of Independence, George Washington's journal, John Adams' diary, Samuel Adams' "The Rights of the Colonists," and William Penn's "The Frame of Government of Pennsylvania." + *Stevens Creek School, 10300 Ainsworth Dr., Cupertino, CA 95014 (408) 245-3312*

Student group sues Arizona State University

A Christian group at Arizona State University says it should be allowed to bar non-Christians and practicing homosexuals from membership and officer positions.

The Arizona State University's chapter of the Christian Legal Society has filed suit, seeking recognition as an official campus organization without having to comply with the school's non-discrimination policy.

ASU is requiring the Christian Legal Society chapter to "open its membership and its leadership to everyone, regardless of their religious preference or their sexual orientation."

The lawsuit is one of several filed against universities across the country by the Christian Legal Society and the Alliance Defense Fund. + *Christian Legal Society, 4208 Evergreen Lane, Suite 222, Annandale, VA 22003 (703) 642-1070*
+ *Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287 (480) 965-9011*

Famed Atheist sees evidence for God

A legendary British philosopher and atheist, Antony Flew, has changed his mind about the existence of God in light of recent scientific evidence. Flew, a prolific author, has argued against the existence of God for more than 50 years. Flew first revealed his change of mind in a video of a discussion with several others at New York University. This discussion was organised by the Institute for Metascientific Research.

The video was titled, "Has Science Discovered God?" Flew said he is now best described as a deist, a person who believes God created the universe but is not actively involved in people's lives today. Flew credits his belief in God to arguments from design such as those espoused by the "intelligent

design" (ID) movement. ID argues that the universe operates in such a way that it points to the existence of an intelligent creator.

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

Two denominations develop better relationship

On 27 November, two presbyteries, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW) and the International Presbyterian Church (IPC) met in the same place. They had a joint worship service followed by a time of reports and discussion, where there was some honest appraisal of the differences between the two bodies—most of which are emphasis and style. The end result was a much warmer feeling between the two churches.

+ *International Presbyterian Church, Drayton Green, W13 0JD*

Fuller Seminary President comments cause controversy

Evangelical Christian leaders are upset by the comments made by Fuller Theological Seminary President Richard Mouw, at the

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' "Evening of Friendship" series which was sponsored by Standing Together Ministries, an evangelical Christian group.

Transcripts provided by Mouw said that Mouw apologised for evangelical Christians' misrepresentation of the Mormon beliefs. "Let me state it clearly. We evangelicals have sinned against you." "We've often seriously misrepresented the beliefs and practices of members of the LDS faith." It's a terrible thing to bear false witness...We've told you what you believe without first asking you." Some evangelical pastors at the event were disturbed by Mouw's comments.

"I am deeply sorry for causing distress in the evangelical community," Mouw wrote. "[But] I make no apology for wanting to foster gentle and reverent dialogue with Mormon friends."

+ *Fuller Theological Seminary, 135 N. Oakland Ave., Pasadena, CA 91182*

Emerging Law School

Liberty University, a Baptist school in Lynchburg, Virginia, founded in 1971 by the Rev. Jerry Falwell, has an emerging law school.

Calling all country boys and girls to become

NETWORKERS



If you have always wanted to be a Cadet or Calvinette but live too far away from a club, we would love to hear from you!

NETWORKERS is for children aged 9-15 years old, and you would be a correspondence member with the closest club, able to attend camps and any club functions that you could make.

Your counsellor and cadre would be your correspondent friends and leader.

INTERESTED?

Then write to me -
**Cr Rob Wierenga, 35 Humber Street
Island Bay, Wellington**

The institution has only 60 students and six faculty members. Provisional accreditation by the American Bar Association, which certifies that a school has been evaluated on the quality of its legal education and allows students to sit for the bar exam in any state, is at least two years away. But by teaching law from a Christian perspective, Falwell hopes to train a cadre of Christian lawyers to fight what he sees as the growing secularisation of public life across the US.

Where the Liberty curriculum differs from most law schools is that legal studies are integrated with questions about morality, discussions centered on natural law, and classes peppered with Christian perspectives. + Liberty University, 1971 University Blvd., Lynchburg, VA 24502 (434) 582-2000

Rumsfeld supports Boy Scouts

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld has endorsed in a letter to the House speaker J. Dennis Hastert, Illinois Republican, the continued support of Scout troops which meet on military bases. The American Civil Liberties Union contends the government sponsorship violates religious freedoms, since the Boy Scouts require members to pledge allegiance to God. Mr. Rumsfeld, an Eagle Scout, said he supported a House resolution that promises continued military support.

+ Boy Scouts of America, National Council, PO Box 152079, Irving, TX 75015-2079

South African court rules for same-sex 'marriage'

South Africa could be the next country to legalize same-sex "marriage" as a result of a court ruling on 30 November which reads, "Marriage is the union of two persons to the exclusion of all others for life."

Pro-family groups and politicians there promise to fight the ruling.

+ Southern Baptist Convention, 901 Commerce St., Nashville, TN 37203

Most Americans believe in virgin birth

In a new Newsweek poll on beliefs about Jesus, 79 percent of Americans believe that, as the Bible says, Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary. Sixty-seven percent say they believe that the entire story of Christmas—the Virgin Birth, the angelic proclamation to the shepherds, the Star of Bethlehem, and the Wise Men from the East—is historically accurate.

Twenty-four percent of Americans believe the story of Christmas is a theological invention written to affirm faith in Jesus Christ.

Fifty-five percent said they believe every word of the Bible is literally accurate. Thirty-eight percent do not believe that about the Bible.

+ Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1211 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 305, Washington, DC 20036 (202) 293-4710

Dutch Hospital euthanises babies

A Dutch hospital, Groningen University Hospital, has acknowledged it extinguished the lives of four newborns in 2003, the Associated Press reported 30 Nov. Those deaths were reported to the government, but no charges have been brought against the hospital. The Justice Ministry of The Netherlands said 14 cases of child euthanasia were reported in the years prior to 2003. Some of those took place in other hospitals. It is clear the hospital had already carried out euthanasia on babies before the government had an opportunity to decide on its legality.

+ Groningen University Hospital, AZG, PO Box 30.001, 9700 RB Groningen

Heidelberg Seminary purchases its own building

The Board of Heidelberg Theological Seminary has purchased a building in Vermillion, South Dakota, to serve as the second home of the Seminary.

The building was purchased from the local Jehovah's Witness group for US\$80,000. On 6 December the Heidelberg Theological Seminary Board of Directors approved the construction of two classrooms in the building, and tentatively approved a floor plan that provides for four offices, two classrooms, a reception area, a chapel and combined classroom, a lounge, and two library areas. + Heidelberg Theological Seminary, Dr. Robert Grossmann, Professor and Registrar, 830 Madison St., Vermillion, SD 57069 (605) 624-4337

Bible portions available in Hakkanese vernacular

Taiwan's Bible Association has recently released "Good News for Hakka: Proverbs, Psalms and the Gospel According to John" in one volume.

General Secretary Lai Chun-ming said, "This book makes use of the contemporary Hakka vernacular as it is spoken on the street. Insofar as it was possible, the translation was made so as to put the Bible into an idiom that can easily be grasped and passed along."

Rev. Peng Der-kuei, specialized minister for Hakka mission at Taipei's Shuang-kien Presbyterian Church, said that special features of the new volume include combined use of Chinese characters and Romanisation, accompanied by a preface in which the Romanisation system for Hakkanese is clearly explained.

The Hakka Gospel Association has 2,000 volumes for sale.

+ Hakka Gospel Association, TEL +886 3 5945546 www.pctpress.com.tw

ACLU charged with disregard for truth

A Louisiana elementary school teacher has filed a defamation lawsuit against the American Civil Liberties Union, three ACLU

employees, and a lesbian mother who claims her son was disciplined for using the word "gay" in the classroom. The lawsuit alleges the ACLU caused damage and injury to teacher Terry Bethea by disseminating "untrue and defamatory" statements about her. According to the civil liberties group, Bethea told student Marcus McLaurin "his family is a dirty word" because his mother, Sharon Huff, is in a lesbian relationship. Max Jordan, Bethea's attorney, says the eight-year-old was disciplined for being disruptive in class, not for discussing his mother's lifestyle with other classmates, and the teacher never scolded him in front of the rest of the class for using the word "gay."

+ ACLU of Louisiana, PO Box 56157 New Orleans, LA 70156-6157 (504) 522-0617

Group receives dinosaur approval

Answers in Genesis, a religious organisation building a creation museum in Boone County Kentucky, wants to place several metal dinosaur sculptures at its 48-acre complex. Because the sculptures are considered signs, the organization had to ask Boone County for a change in zoning.

A zone change has been approved.

Followers of the organisation believe in a literal reading of the Book of Genesis, that the Earth's creatures were created by God, not as the result of an evolutionary process. The 95,000-square-foot museum is expected to cost US\$25 million and is scheduled to open in the spring of 2007.

+ Answers in Genesis, PO Box 510, Hebron, Kentucky 41048

New Dutch Bible on bestseller's list

A new Dutch translation of the Bible has "catapulted" onto the bestseller lists. The first copy of the New Bible Translation was presented to Queen Beatrix on 27 October, and released to the public two days later. One week after its launch, three of the various editions of the Bible were on the 10 top best-sellers list. The launch of the new translation triggered several Bible reading marathons throughout the Netherlands. In one marathon, which lasted for five days, about 400 people took turns to read aloud the entire text of the new translation.

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

South African churchman sells rare whisky to repay money to church

A large collection of rare whiskies belonging to a South African Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) official will be auctioned to recover some of the two million rands (US\$345 000) he took from the church without permission. A court heard this week that Christoffel

Hattingh, aged 54, admitted to a church official he took the money while working at the head office of the DRC in Bloemfontein, the capital of Free State province, the Volksblad newspaper reported.

+ *Ecumenical News International*, PO Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland

Puritan Reformed Seminary dedicates new building

On 22 December, the new seminary building of the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary was dedicated. Prayers had been asked for months that the building would be paid in full by the time of the dedication evening. These prayers were answered five minutes before the meeting began when donations given which covered the remaining amount needed.

Rev. Mark Kelderman, chairman of the Theological Seminary Committee, opened the dedication evening. Rev. Maurice Roberts, pastor of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), Inverness, Scotland, and a frequent lecturer at the seminary, gave the first address.

Thanks go out to the nearly one thousand people who have given donations, large or small, to pay for the new seminary building.
+ *Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary*, 2965 Leonard NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49525 (616) 977-0599

Lutheran and Reformed Churches in France form union

A joint assembly of the synod of the Reformed Church of Alsace and Lorraine (ERAL) and of the upper consistory of the Church of the Augsburg Confession of Alsace and Lorraine (ECAAL) voted by a large majority in favor of establishing the Union of Protestant Churches in Alsace and Lorraine (UEPAL).

The new structure, as underlined in the signatory document, will allow the churches "to better combine their efforts to give new impulse to their presence in the public and to better serve the gospel calling." To come into force, the union must be confirmed by a French government decree. When the union comes into force, the ECAAL will be the Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession in Alsace and Lorraine (EPCAAL) and ERAL the Protestant Reformed Church in Alsace and Lorraine (EPRAL).

+ *Lutheran World Information*, PO Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland

Opposition to Christian evangelism results in murder

Opposition to Christian evangelism in Nigeria has resulted in the murder of Sunday Nache Achi, a fourth-year architectural student at Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University in the northern city of Bauchi. University representatives earlier expelled students Abraham Adamu Misal, Hannatu Haruna Alkali and Habakkuk Solomon for distributing a

Christian leaflet that compared the teachings of Jesus with Islam. Muslim students at the nearby Bauchi Federal Polytechnic threatened two Christians with death before the pair was expelled from the school for similar evangelistic activities. Abducted from his room by masked assailants dressed in jihad style, Achi was strangled to death sometime in the early morning hours of 9 December and his body abandoned next to a mosque. Bauchi state Governor Alhaji Adamu Mu'azu promised a full investigation. However, authorities have not yet arrested any suspects in the murder.
+ *Compass Digest*, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, CA 92799

Shock ruling on religious vilification in Australia

On December 17, 2004, Judge Higgins of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal announced that he has found Christian pastors Daniel Scot and Danny Nalliah guilty of religious vilification.

The judge's 100 pages of reasons will be released next week, but a short summary said that the two Daniels breached section 8 of the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001, which says a person cannot engage in conduct which "incites hatred against, serious contempt for, or revulsion or severe ridicule of, that other person or class of persons".

Judge Higgins said the exceptions allowed under the Act—which include events held for any genuine religious purpose—did not apply in this case because the conduct of the defendants could "not be regarded as reasonable and in good faith".

This is astounding. The event in question, you may remember, was a seminar for Christians held in a church, conducted by a pastor with expert knowledge of Islam and the Quran, to explain Quranic teachings and to help Christians know how best to reach out to Muslim people. There was no evidence that Christian seminar attendees felt hatred towards Muslims as a result of the teaching—rather the reverse, since Pastor Daniel Scot had encouraged them to love Muslims and invite them into their homes.

However the Act does not require such evidence to be provided. The evidence of vilification, it seems, was not whether Christians felt hatred or contempt towards Muslims as a result of the seminar, but whether the three Muslim attendees (who did not reveal their faith and were technically not invited) felt hurt by Daniel Scot's translations of Quranic verses. The three Muslim attendees acknowledged under cross-examination that their knowledge of the Quran was slight.

The judge said that Pastor Scot "failed to differentiate between Muslims throughout the world, that he preached a literal translation of the Quran and of Muslims' religious practices which were not mainstream."

Bill Muehlenberg of the Australian Family

Association pointed out: "Most Muslims would object to this, arguing that they do adhere to a literal understanding and translation of the Quran. And how does a secular judge with no expertise in religion make such decisions, when Islamic scholars themselves are divided on such crucial questions of theology, interpretation and exegesis?"

"Much of what the judge considered offensive was simply quotations from the Quran itself. To argue that quoting a religious book makes one guilty of vilification would put 98% of religious discussion out of bounds," Bill Muehlenberg said.

Indeed. Phillip Adams—the atheist columnist in *The Australian* who seems to have a fixation against all things biblical and Christian—would be behind bars in no time. Or would he? It seems that the Victorian Act may only apply to religions other than Christianity. Moreover Queensland has a similar Act, and the ALP wants a law against racial and religious vilification to apply nationwide.

Bill Muehlenberg argues that such laws could mean the death of Christianity in Australia. But that would only happen if we lie down and let it die. This is a wake up call!
+ *Festival of Light, Adelaide*

Millions flock to Chinese House Churches

A spokesman for Voice of the Martyrs is encouraging Christians to use the start of the year to remember, to pray for, and to take action on behalf of persecuted Chinese Christians. Communist officials in China recently arrested a top house church leader. And this past summer, a Chinese Christian was allegedly beaten to death after being arrested for handing out Bibles in public. Those are only two recent examples of the persecution of believers in Communist China. But despite the inherent dangers of professing faith in Jesus Christ, the Christian church in that country continues to grow.

+ *Allie Martin*, Agape Press, PO Drawer 2440, Tupelo, MS 38803

Membership in Episcopal Church USA continues to decline

Diane Knippers of the Institute on Religion and Democracy believes the confirmation of V. Gene Robinson (a self-avowed practicing homosexual) into the bishopric, is what triggered the exodus of many people from the Episcopal Church USA. Latest figures show a membership loss of 36,000 people over a one-year period, which Knippers says amounts to shutting down two churches a week, or about 113 for one year. Knippers says the church hierarchy is having trouble admitting the problem. "Church leaders say that the membership decline is because Episcopalians have fewer children than members of other

churches." Knippers says that excuse does not explain the sudden drop in membership after Robinson's confirmation when the denomination had experienced decades of steady membership loss prior to that action.

+ *The Institute on Religion and Democracy, 1110 Vermont Ave., NW, Suite 1180, Washington, DC 20005 (202) 969-8430*

Kinsey film draws protest

Dr. Judith Reisman, in 1991, wrote a book called "Kinsey, Sex and Fraud," as a prominent voice against Alfred Kinsey's legacy. Now, tapping from that book, Concerned Women for America, the nation's largest women's group has encouraged members to hand out leaflets (at theaters) that discredit the new film and accuse Kinsey of committing child sexual abuse and scientific fraud.

+ *Concerned Women for America, 1015 Fifteenth St. N.W., Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20005 (202) 488-7000*

Ten Million 'born-again' haven't been to church in six months

The Barna Research Group reports that in the United States about 10 million self-proclaimed, born-again Christians have not been to church in the last six months, apart from Christmas or Easter. (Barna defines "born-again" as those who say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important today, and believe they will "go to heaven because I have confessed my sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior.")

Nearly all born-again say their spiritual life is very important, but for 10 million of them, spiritual life has nothing to do with church.
+ *The Barna Group, Ltd., 1957 Eastman Ave., Ste B, Ventura, CA 93003=20 (805) 639-0000*

Muslim chops off Pakistani Christian's arm

A Christian shopkeeper in Pakistan's Punjab province had his arm chopped off by a Muslim customer. Shahbaz Masih, 22, was

approached last November by a customer wanting to rent a TV set from his video shop. When Mashi declined his request, his customer, 26-year-old butcher Ahmed Ali, became furious. He returned afterwards, armed with a butcher's axe. Ali forced his way into Masih's house, attacked Masih and chopped off his left arm near the elbow. As Ali left, he threatened the victim and his widowed mother with even more "dire consequences" for the alleged insult he had to endure. Following his discharge from the hospital, Masih was forced to close his shop, leave the village with his mother and go into hiding.

+ *Compass Direct, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, CA 92799-7250 (949) 862-0314*

Dr. Jack L. Arnold dies in the pulpit

Dr. Jack L. Arnold died on 9 January while preaching at Covenant Presbyterian Church, Oviedo, Florida. As he neared the end of the sermon he spoke of his favorite verse, "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain." He quoted Wesley saying, 'Until my work on this earth is done, I am immortal. But when my work for Christ is done,' and he slapped his hands together toward the sky saying, "I am out here! I don't know about you, but when my work is done, I go to be with Jesus, and that will be gain! And when I go to heaven...." At this point, Jack paused briefly, looked up, swayed slightly and grabbed the podium before falling back to the floor. And he was gone. Dr. Arnold leaves his wife, Carol, and four sons.

+ *Covenant Presbyterian Church, 1231 Reformation Dr., Oviedo, FL 32765 (407) 977-7707*

Tsunami updates

REC News Exchange reports that as far as they know there was no loss of life of members in the regions, which are in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Myanmar. Although Charles Jansz of the Dutch Reformed Church in Sri Lanka said many church members in the capital of Colombo did lose all their homes and belongings.

Lutheran churches in Nias, an island off the southeaster coast of Sumatra, were heavily damaged.

+ *REC News Exchange, 2050 Breton Rd., SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546*

Kenyan Presbyterians disagree about Masonic artifacts

The Presbyterian Church of East Kenya is debating the value of historical symbols and relics found in churches that are now thought to be linked to the Freemasons. A group within the Presbyterian Church has destroyed more than 30 stained glass windows and metal grills bearing Masonic symbols in churches built by Scottish missionaries. The actions follow the report of a denominational task force which recommended their removal of

"un-Christian signs, symbols, and images." Some church leaders believe that includes any of the signs or symbols of the freemasons, as well as other symbols that are said to represent the customs of the Maasai, a semi-nomadic people located primarily in Kenya.

As a result, some church leaders are planning to destroy or demolish historic churches. However, some church leaders urge caution. "They can be removed if found to be inconsistent with our faith, but they should be preserved in our church museums, to show where we have come from," says Anglican Archbishop Benjamin Nzimbi.

+ *PCUSA, 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202*

France warned by Protestant body of 'secularist' zeal

The main body representing Protestants in avowedly-secular France has warned of a climate of "secularist zeal" as the country marks the centenary this year of the separation of church and state. At a meeting with French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, the president of the Protestant Federation of France, the Rev. Jean-Arnold de Clermont, said Protestant churches were facing a host of "administrative irritations."
+ *Ecumenical News International, PO Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland*

New Executive Secretary of World Reformed Fellowship

Dr. Samuel Logan, who is currently concluding his 25 years of service as president of Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, will be taking over as Executive Secretary of World Reformed Fellowship.

World Reformed Fellowship began in 2000, on the campus of Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida. It represents Reformed leaders from five world regions—Latin America, Asia, North America, Europe, and Africa—as a visible expression of the Reformed faith.

+ *World Reformed Fellowship, PO Box 3542, Lilburn, GA 30048*

Kidnapped Iraqi Archbishop released unharmed

Less than 24 hours after armed gunmen kidnapped the Syrian Catholic Archbishop of Mosul, 66-year-old Basile Georges Casmoussa was set free.

Late in the day on 17 January armed men accosted Casmoussa as he left a parishioner's home near the university, forced him into the trunk of a car and drove away. The Vatican reacted quickly to the abduction, calling it a "despicable terrorist act," and demanded the archbishop's immediate release. Casmoussa was released just before noon local time unharmed on 18 January. Catholic officials declared that no ransom had been paid for his release.

+ *Compass Direct, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, CA 92799-7250 (949) 862-0314*

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The saints of ancient British history

The Church in Britain 597-1000

Patricia van Laar

The year 597 was momentous in the history of the church in Britain. In the north the well-loved and respected Columba died, leaving a legacy of blessing. In the south a fresh face was to appear; a fresh impetus in the spread of the gospel would find its way to these shores. In the north the story is one of warfare, intrigue, exile, and above all, the marvellous overruling hand of God, although at the time this must have been difficult to see. In the south, the task of spreading the gospel was being undertaken at last, at the instigation of Pope Gregory I, and it is this story which must first be taken up in this continued account of the history of the church in Britain. The two sections of the church, north and south, were divided not in essential doctrine, but in practice of the faith in structure, form and observance of worship.

This fact was to cause resentment and difficulty, until one side overcame the other at the Synod of Whitby, in 664, which allied the whole church with Rome.

The Angels of Britain

“They are Angels, not Angles.”

So said Pope Gregory, upon enquiring who were the fair-haired young people being offered for sale as slaves in the ancient market of Rome.

Gregory came from a devout, high-class Christian home. He was extremely gifted, especially in speaking and music, and was a very capable organiser and administrator, with wide experience in both state and church. He followed the ‘family career,’ entering public service. By the age of thirty-two he was the Civil Governor in Rome, presiding over the Senate (Prefect). Honoured though this position was, and most unusual for one so young, his Christian upbringing left him with a longing for the opportunity to study and meditate in the service of God. So when he inherited his father’s estate in 374 Gregory gave it to the poor and founded monasteries, including one in his own home (named St Andrew’s). He intended living there in quietness as a monk, but his strength of character and his talents meant it was not to be. Twice he was called from his life at St Andrew’s, first by the pope who called him to be one of his own close advisors and to be Seventh Deacon with responsibility for a portion of the church. In this capacity, the pope sent him as Papal Envoy to Constantinople for seven years.

Afterwards Gregory returned to his childhood home at St Andrew’s, and

remained there enjoying his quiet life until the pope died in a plague. Then Gregory himself was nominated as pope. The Empire was by now in the process of falling to pieces, and Gregory realised that the Church could no longer look to the Emperor for hope or help. Understanding this, he reluctantly accepted the call, feeling ordained by God to be a bishop who was truly ‘a Servant of the servants of God.’ His deep desire was that the churches should be able to look to Rome as a place for help, leadership and guidance for all Christians.

His interest had been aroused by the blond captives from the land of the Angles (England), and nothing would stop his determination that the Gospel should be heard amongst their people. Pope Gregory was given to puns, delighting in a play upon



An ancient depiction of Pope Gregory I

words both in his writing and his speaking. So, learning that these particular youths came from the kingdom of Deira (Yorkshire), he is reported as declaring, “They shall be saved ‘de ira’ (from wrath),” and hearing further that their king was named Aella, he decided that “Allelujah must be sung there.”

Opportunity in Kent

Gregory soon saw that the opportunity for him in England lay initially not in Deira (central England), but in the southern kingdom nearest Gaul, i.e. in Kent. The powerful King Ethelbert of Kent was the great-grandson of that sea rover Hengist, to whom Vortigern had given lands in Kent. His family had taken over large regions, forcing the ancient British into Wales. Ethelbert already knew

something of Christianity, as his wife was a Christian from the Royal Frankish house. Here was Gregory’s chance! He arranged to send the Prior of St Andrew’s monastery, Augustine, to England, accompanied by 40 monks. They were to sail to Britain. He saw urgency in this, writing to Gaul, “News has reached us that the people of the English look and long to be converted to the Christian faith, but the priests nearby do not bother.” This latter phrase was quite true, especially of the church in Wales, although perhaps it was not altogether a fair assessment of the situation, considering the background history. (Gregory was not aware that this neglect was to be remedied shortly by the followers of Columba in Iona.)

So it was that Augustine (of Canterbury) set sail with his monks, landing at Easter 597, within a month or two of Columba’s death. King Ethelbert received the missionaries favourably and he himself became a Christian. (More about this will be said in the account of St Augustine, to follow.) From this beginning, in the way of tribal society (as it is sometimes today), large numbers in a mass movement turned to the Christian faith as disciples. Thousands were baptised, as the Lord commanded in Matt.28: 19. So began the movement in the south, which was to reach far into the kingdom of this king.

God’s Links in the North

But what of the north, the Kingdom of Deira? Would the Word reach this region, which had provided the ‘angel’ slaves who inspired Gregory to send Augustine to England? Aella had been King of Deira. Would this kingdom indeed sing “Allelujah” to God on High? Had God forgotten the place that Gregory declared should be saved De Ira (from wrath)? By no means! Gregory himself would have been surprised and delighted could he have seen how God would fulfil his desire, in His own way and His own time. We shall follow that story in the next accounts of individual church leaders.

The Next Centuries

The years following c.590 were theologically and spiritually plagued by the slowly increasing power of Rome, as on the Continent. They saw the gradual introduction of false doctrine, dogma and practices, and hand in hand, the deterioration of the monasteries. These, although begun with good intentions, overlooked the fact that Christians are meant to be “*in the world* but not of it.” By the time of the Reformation,

they were grossly deficient in moral and spiritual values. The worst excesses were in the years from c.1000 AD through to the 16th century.

Yet even during these last five pre-Reformation centuries, God was not without

His witnesses. These were the years of Wycliffe (c.1325–1384) and his followers the Lollards, and of Tyndale (c.1492–1536), the translator of the Bible.

Other faithful saints preceded them, most of them from the monasteries. Some of

these will be very familiar, others almost unknown, but each made an incalculable contribution to the spread of the Lord's knowledge in the formerly pagan islands of Britain, with golden links to its spread on the Continent of Europe.

Mission in focus

Janice Reid

Changed lives in Eastern Europe (The story of EELAC)

By Colin Macpherson

Benjamin Franklin once said, "Give me 26 lead soldiers, and I will conquer the world." He was referring to the 26 letters of the English alphabet cast in printer's type. Lenin too recognised the potential of the printed page: "I would rather write a pamphlet than speak at 20 mass rallies."

Literature can be used for good or ill. Many Christians have been helped to salvation through good books. Others have found books invaluable in their own spiritual development or in their ministry of teaching others. EELAC wants to extend to people in East Europe the privilege of books of eternal worth.

What is EELAC?

EELAC is not a publishing house; it does not produce books. Its function is rather to

support national believers in the former communist countries of East Europe and the CIS (former USSR) who themselves want to publish good Christian literature in their own cultural contexts.

The work started in the early 1980s, during the communist era. While some western missions were smuggling literature into the East, a few far-sighted missionaries recognised the equal importance of working with believers inside these countries who wanted to produce and distribute Christian literature of their own. The East European Literature Advisory Committee was established to encourage and support these believers. The name is a bit of a mouthful but was deliberately chosen to be easily forgotten—a strategy to suit the times!

With the collapse of the communist regimes, the door for evangelical publishing opened wider. Between 1989 and 1992,

EELAC helped to establish indigenous publishing houses in five East European countries. Now, in 2004, it supports 12 publishing works in 11 countries and has helped publish more than 1000 titles in 15 different languages. 3.7 million books have been produced and distributed in more than 20 countries.

Where does EELAC serve?

EELAC now supports 12 publishers in 11 countries.

- _ Russia (St Petersburg)
- _ Estonia (Tallin)
- _ Czech Republic (Prague)
- _ Poland (Katowice)
- _ Hungary (Budapest)
- _ Romania (Cluj)
- _ Bulgaria (Sofia)
- _ Serbia (Belgrade)
- _ Croatia (Zagreb)
- _ Macedonia (Skopje)
- _ Albania (Tirana)

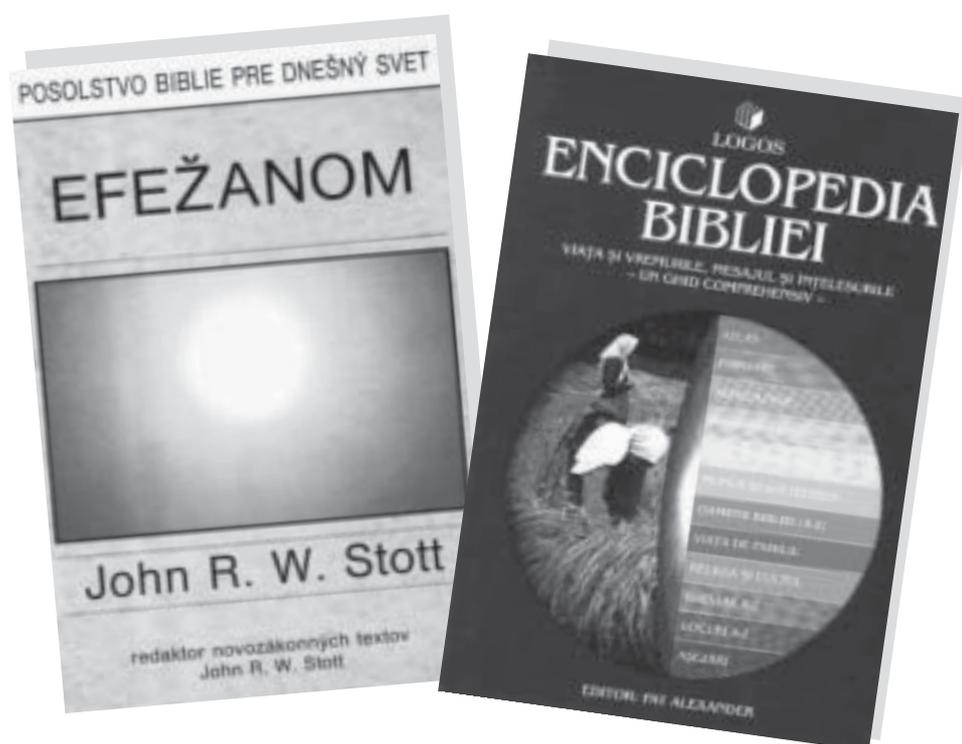
In 2003, the EELAC Trustees decided to be open to possible opportunities in some new countries. Countries which might be considered initially include Ukraine, Lithuania, Moldova, Belarus and the Central Asian Republics. This is a bold decision, taken only after prolonged discussion and much prayer.

What are EELAC's goals?

The primary aim is changed lives: the transformation of church and society. To achieve this aim, EELAC is trying to nurture long-term indigenous publishing works which will respond to the needs around them and become self-supporting wherever possible.

There are several reasons for taking this approach:

1. Cultural sensitivity. The national publisher understands the culture and his audience better than any outside missionary and can judge which books are needed.



2. A long-term ministry. Once missionary interest has moved to a different part of the world, commercially-viable indigenous publishing ministers on.
3. National authors. The indigenous publisher is the most appropriate professional to identify and develop local authors who will write for their own culture.
4. A better investment of God's resources. By 2003, every £1 invested by EELAC led to over £5 of book production and sales. This ratio is growing year on year. As publishers move to self-support, requests for help from other places can be considered.

How can EELAC help?

EELAC has provided capital to help fund premises, office equipment, vehicles, production costs and salaries. Sometimes it sponsors the production of a particular book title or series. Since EELAC's long-term aim is to help establish independent publishers, funding tends to be on a declining basis over time. Sometimes a decision has to be made to reduce funding in order to prevent a dependency culture. But there are other ways in which EELAC can help.

Mentoring is very much part of Colin Macpherson's work. He travels regularly to East Europe, supporting publishers with practical advice and encouraging creative thinking. Some publishers are passionate about translating and editing their books to the highest standards, but have less understanding of how to get them into people's hands once they have been printed. Sales and distribution methods are not instinctive to post-communist evangelicals. Since books sitting in a warehouse cannot change lives, ideas for moving them on are needed.

EELAC has also organised many training conferences, bringing together evangelical publishers from all over the region. In 2003, William and Carine Mackenzie of Christian Focus Publications joined East European publishers in Budapest to look at sales and marketing strategies.

A further benefit of such conferences has been the opportunity to network with other publishers. Years of communism have bred a low level of trust, but now the three most mature first-tier publishers are starting to visit and mentor staff in the newer publishing houses.

What kind of books?

There is a real need in East European countries for Bible commentaries and other Bible tools which will help open the Scriptures to believers. The market for them is small, but they are eagerly devoured by those with a teaching ministry and are thus strategic in the planting and strengthening of the church.



Selling books in Russia



Book stall in one of the Baltic states

Most of these books are translations. However, an increasing number are now being written by national authors. The Bulgarian chapter of IFES has published an indigenous commentary on Amos, with one on Hosea in the pipeline. A Macedonian theologian is preparing a book on the doctrine of salvation. It is a core aim of EELAC to nurture the publication of locally authored titles.

Communism undermined leadership in the family as well as in the church, and publishers in many East European countries have found that parenting and family issues are subjects that need to be addressed. Local knowledge is crucial in identifying

topical issues with broad appeal and greater distribution potential.

How successful is the work?

Many people in former communist countries do not appreciate the value of books. Their experience of propaganda may have led them to distrust all printed material. They may also have been accustomed to book subsidies and possibly free Christian books from abroad, so they don't expect to pay much, if anything, for their books.

Publishers too are often slow to understand the market economy. Having grown accustomed to subsidies, they are reluctant to set realistic prices which will help

them towards sustainability and independence.

But there are successes! In 2002, after eleven years of hard work, two publishing houses in Hungary and the Czech Republic each made a small profit for the first time. Countless stories tell of the difference that Christian books are making to people's lives throughout East Europe.

What next?

As the first-tier publishers become more self-sufficient, the EELAC Board would like to be able to respond to requests from other countries and even other continents. They believe this is what God wants them to do and are committed to it, working increasingly in partnership with the first-generation publishers who are being challenged to pass on their expertise and vision to others.

This strategy brings a particular challenge in terms of the financial and management resources that will be needed to implement it. Funding has dropped considerably in recent years, largely because of the fall in financial markets and partly because East Europe is now yesterday's news. Current staffing is inadequate to cover all aspects of the work, especially if more time and effort need to be devoted to publicity and fundraising. Colin Macpherson is able, but suffers the same spatial limitations as everyone else. Help is needed if the work is to continue and grow.

Reprinted (with adaptations) from "From the Frontiers," the mission magazine of the Free Church of Scotland. Used by permission. Colin Macpherson, an elder with the Free Church of Scotland, took over as General Secretary of EELAC in 2002. If you would like to find out more about EELAC's work or support the work financially, please contact Dr Colin Macpherson, 68 Suilven Way, Inverness, IV3 8PD, Scotland, or email him on eelac@cali.co.uk

MIF prayer notes

Walter and Jeannette Hagoort are thankful for the generosity and hospitality of many people in the Auckland and Wellington presbyteries. They had a fruitful (if tiring!) schedule of deputation meetings, and are grateful for the level of interest shown in their ministry. Back in Papua New Guinea, they continue their work of running the Christian Guest House at Mapang, as well as helping the new, young church at Vanagi. Pray for strength and joy in their task, and also for the growth of national believers—particularly church leaders.

Rev. Barry and Mrs. Anne James have the following prayer and praise items:

Give thanks for:

- Health and strength, as they approach the second half of their term of service as Associate Missionaries with the Orthodox Presbyterian Uganda Mission (OPUM).
- The support and prayers of the brethren in New Zealand, and particularly for the loving support of their 'sending' congregation, Silverstream. Thanksgiving, too, for the encouragement and support of the Reformed Church in Canberra.
- The successful knee replacement operation (back in the USA) for Meredith Proctor, wife of the OPUM Missionary, Phil Proctor. This allowed the family to return to Uganda at the end of January.

Pray for:

- The ongoing work of Knox Theological College (in Mbale); the supply of sufficient lecturers; perseverance of the students—many of them very 'new' to this standard of instruction.
- The stability and spiritual growth of the 12 congregations of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Uganda (OPCUM), and for an increase in its desire and capacity to become both self-supporting and self-propagating.

- The impact of the outreach work among the Karamojong, in Nakaale/Karamojo...and that the continuous demand upon the Mission to meet material needs might not swamp the discharging of the prime object of reaching these people with the Gospel of saving grace in Christ Jesus.

Janice Reid continues to develop radio training resources during her time in Cambodia. Progress is well underway on the book which Janice and Jean-Luc hope will help announcers in many different locations to learn key principles of effective radio outreach. Please pray for wisdom and concentration as Janice continues work on this. Pray also for the continuing revision of the managers' course, which Janice and Jean-Luc expect to teach again in Indonesia later this year.

Pray for our short term missionaries:

Jared Berends and **Heidi Posthuma** are teaching English in sensitive countries in Asia. Pray for both Heidi and Jared: that their lessons would be effective, and their relationships with students and others in the community grow deeper. Pray for many opportunities to share the word of Truth with people they meet. Pray for safety, health, and energy:

- Heidi has a long, busy semester ahead of her with no breaks until the end of the academic year—teaching 500 school students each week!
- Jared asks particular prayer for Christian workers in his town. As the weather warms up, itinerant evangelists plan to travel to neighbouring towns to spread the Word. Pray that these workers, although young in faith, would come to spiritual maturity and may be powerfully used to proclaim the Gospel in the places they visit. Also pray for Jared and his teammate, for effective witness to their students and good relationships with leaders.

Hayden Bosgra in Ecuador is continuing his evangelism and English-teaching project. He is approaching the end of his term there (May), so please pray for the Lord's strength and comfort: strength to finish everything he's working on, and leave no "loose ends" to his ministry; and comfort as he must say goodbye to people who have become close friends in the past year.

*Reprints of articles in
Faith in Focus can be
obtained by contacting
the Editor*

A feminine focus

The Feminine Virtue of Modesty

Sally Davey

You probably thought that a discussion of this subject in the women's column of a Christian magazine would major on dress, but that is not my primary focus. Modesty is a quality with wide definition and many applications; and though its expression in the way we clothe ourselves is important (perhaps especially so today) we shall not begin there. Let me illustrate my point with an incident from Charlotte Bronte's mid-nineteenth century novel, *Jane Eyre*. Not long after Jane's arrival as a governess at Mr Rochester's house, Mrs Fairfax, the housekeeper, describes Jane as "so discreet, and so thoroughly modest and sensible." This is high praise: Jane has fitted into this odd and mysterious household very well indeed. But in calling her modest, Mrs Fairfax is not referring to her clothing, demure as it is (Jane wore simple grey gowns). No, she is alluding to Jane's quiet, unobtrusive manner – a manner that did nothing to draw attention to herself. She did not seek the attention of others, and had a humble estimation of her own abilities. She resembled the *New Shorter Oxford Dictionary's* definition of modest: "unassuming, diffident, bashful; not bold or forward... decorous in manner and conduct; scrupulously avoiding impropriety or indecency; reserved in sexual matters... not excessive or exaggerated, moderate, limited, restrained..." These are the things Mrs Fairfax meant when she praised Jane; and these are the kinds of things I believe apply equally well in today's cultural setting. These qualities grace our Christian witness.

Defining modesty spiritually

In the most general sense, modesty involves a willingness to remain in the background – even while others shine – and having a realistic view of our own worth in comparison to others. Like gentleness, modesty means that self is in the background. Jesus got to

the heart of this in the Sermon on the Mount when He taught that the real test of whether we are serving God or ourselves is whether we are willing to do spiritual work like prayer, fasting or giving silently and privately. Christians who pray, fast and give in secret are not people who want to be noticed. They are modest, and interested more in what God thinks of them than what those around them think. Modest people are not trying to attract others' attention because they know they have God's attention.

I have always been attracted to the heroines of Victorian novels because of this self-effacing quality that seems to characterize so many of them. They are prepared to serve, care for, encourage and support other family members and needy people without expecting recognition or reward. And though this was not their motive, such actions ironically make them stand out as the most attractive people in the story. Take, for example, Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*. David's childhood friend, Agnes Wickfield, loves him deeply but silently. David grows up and seems to take Agnes's friendship for granted. He marries the pretty, fluttering Dora who is totally helpless in every trial. Quietly, Agnes helps Dora for her and for David's sake, but she is careful never to do anything that would make herself look better and Dora worse in David's sight. Even when Dora dies she stays as far out of view as possible. When David's eyes finally open he realizes just how fine and worthy of love his old friend Agnes is. Such heroines may have many abilities, but praise seems to surprise them.

Modesty today

Well, how do the principles of modesty translate into today's world? They are certainly a rarity; and are not highly valued. In fact, there are many ways the thinking of our age urges us not to be modest: it discourages modesty in childhood, in adolescence, in adulthood: and in family, work and church. Scrupulous effort is required if we are to avoid even the simplest kinds of immodesty. It is a case of Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." As J.B. Phillips restates it, we are not to let the world around us squeeze us into its own mould.

However, the world does try. More than twenty years ago I was studying in the United States, and made many friends in fine Christian churches. One family I met briefly had a teenage daughter, studying at high

school. While we were sitting in her living room over a cup of coffee she described her progress at school. "I'm real good at math," she informed me. Well, I thought, sounds a bit boastful. Not very modest, if you know what I mean. But I thought again. Perhaps she just thinks she's telling a straightforward fact? Nothing like being in-your-face honest! Or maybe it's just an all-American way of talking? I tried to suspend judgment. However, in the end I decided that talk of that kind *is* immodest, and that Scripture does warn against it. But we are all tempted: job interviews, Christmassy summarise-the-year letters, and those moments when we feel slighted are prime situations.

Modesty is not self-promotion

Sometimes it seems that immodesty is being institutionalized in our education system – and even in small rural primary schools. Recently I heard how one class had been asked to write their own self-assessments for their various subjects. They were given full encouragement to write all sorts of self-congratulatory comments about their work... If you've done well in reading, then you write that... No one should be afraid to say how good they are. It's important... (and so on). But one mother started wondering – do I really want my daughter to be saying she's good at something? This just doesn't sound right. When we think in biblical terms, it isn't. Consider Proverbs 20:6 "Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, but a faithful man who can find?" (RSV) We may boast of our gifts and graces, but when it comes to it, few of us really are as good as we think.

Proverbs 27:2 pops into my mind most times I read someone's curriculum vitae. (In fact, I cringe when I read most CVs these days). Back in the old days, when I was taught at graduate school how to write a CV, we were told to stick to the basic facts – give the bare minimum. Dates and titles of degrees, list your major, briefly state any academic awards, relevant employment details, marital and health status. It **MUST** be no longer than one side of a page. Prospective employers are totally put off by any descriptive waffle. What has happened? I've seen CVs the size of small books, full of page after page of headings like "My areas of excellence", "My core philosophy of success", "My personal mission statement" and paragraph upon paragraph of self-congratulatory nonsense about how good the writer is at everything he or she cares to turn her hand to. It seems to me that this is what referees are for: "Let another praise you and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips."

Our view of ourselves

But joking at the excesses aside, it seems to me that we have a real problem on our hands when it comes to our view of ourselves. In short, as a culture we have a serious modesty deficit! We need to be more realistically humble, and acknowledge that we fall far short of what we could and should be. We not only lack ability and motivation at times, we are also sinners. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9, RSV). We are biased toward a favourable view of ourselves; we love ourselves too much. Given this, surely it is wise to be very cautious in our estimation of ourselves, and refer people to others for a more accurate assessment of our qualities and our skills.

Modesty is not only related to gentleness; it is also closely related to purity. This is because modesty is all about not drawing attention to oneself. Impure women want to draw the wrong kind of attention to themselves from men. This is a second outworking of immodesty, and it most often has to do with the way we dress and present ourselves, appearance-wise. It is the kind of modesty problem we probably talk most about these days as Christian women. Why? Because it is so pervasive in our culture. To be sure, young women (and their mothers) have always been eager to maximize their physical beauty and graces by means of attractive dress and hairstyles in order to gain the attention of eligible young men. Just read *Pride and Prejudice*! But the blatant exposure of the body to arouse the lustful attention of men as is common today is something entirely different.

Immodesty in dress

One concerned Christian writer puts this trend toward provocativeness and nudity down to a concerted campaign by the swimwear industry – first in Europe, and more recently in America. * However, I doubt that one segment of the fashion industry could do this were it not for a less and less restrained desire on the part of men and women to expose themselves, and in a sexually provocative way, in public. The Scriptures give a kind of overview of what is happening here. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were suddenly aware of their nakedness, and they wanted to cover it. This was the right thing to do. But as the effects of continuing in hardened sin worsen through the generations in a culture, people become more and more shameless in their behaviour. One of the outworkings of this rebellion – exchanging the truth of God for a lie – is being given up by God to lust and impurity and the dishonouring of our bodies (Romans 1:24-25). Lust and impurity are only inflamed by provocative, “sexy” dress and deportment. Christians, who bear the name of Christ and

are His ambassadors, should be quite different in the way they dress. The writers of the New Testament epistles made this especially clear in their instructions to women. They were concerned that Christian women take special care to be modest – and by this, it seems, they meant that women should make every effort to clothe themselves discreetly, so that no one (men intended here) should be tempted to sin by their behaviour or dress. So Paul, in 1 Timothy 2:9, and Peter in 2 Peter 3:3-5, urge women to dress soberly and modestly; not extravagantly and not in a provocative or exhibitionist way. This corresponds with our inner faith, if we claim to believe. Both write that our main adornment should stem from the inner beauty of our hearts – the “gentle and quiet spirit” that Peter mentions, and the “good works” referred to by Paul. So, we should cover up our more private places, sensibly and discreetly. In 1 Corinthians 12:23 (when describing the church as one body with a variety of members) Paul notes that “our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require.” He assumes he is stating the obvious, but sadly, when I look around the church at times, I sometimes wonder...

Modesty within Christ's congregation

Do we, as a church, always observe modesty in our dress? Many is the time I've heard concerned comments from other women about the skimpy dress of young women at worship; about bare midriffs at the Lord's table; and shoulders, arms and legs in too obvious a state of undress. I've seen it too. But I often wonder whether we older women, even those of us in our forties and fifties, are giving a good example. I'm startled sometimes by clothes choices that might look cute (though even then inappropriate) on teenagers, worn by women my age and older. What is going on here? I've wondered. Once or twice I've asked some of my contemporaries – it's a terribly sensitive subject for sure – why they are dressing in such a, well, flamboyant sort of way. Some have said “Oh, I don't want to look like an old so-and-so” – or words to that effect. I thought that was a bit sad, really. Why? Because aging, in a dignified manner, is something to accept with grace as a Christian. God intended it that way. We are growing nearer to Him, nearer to the time we'll be with Him forever, and youthful looks are not always equated with wisdom as far the Bible is concerned, anyway! As an aside, I've always rather liked the clothes in the “Vogue Woman” (euphemism for “mature”!) section of the pattern book. They are flattering, becoming, classic styles that could be worn by women of any age from 25-85.

Don't conform to this world

So, how *should* we dress? Obviously, we live in the culture (see Acts 17:26) in which God has intended us to live, and we need to bear witness as people who know and understand their culture. We are not called to wear some sort of one-style-fits-all Christian uniform. We can't escape the need to dress decently within the range of clothing that ordinary women wear in our time. But just because we need to buy clothes that are available today it doesn't mean we need to be prisoners of the promoters of immodesty. We can make discerning choices, within our budgets, and with good sense informed by wise understanding of what suits our figures and our colouring. Discernment is the operative word, and that is what I think we Christian women often lack today.

Let me explain. While the general principles may seem clear, it is often the specifics that are the battleground, and the cause of some argument. When I was a teenager, it was skirt length that we argued about with our mothers. We wanted to show off our slim figures (which was sinful pride and vanity for a start) but the problem, our mothers informed us, was that a very short mini skirt tempted men to sin. Short skirts were in fashion but they were immodest, and mothers – and schools - had to restrain young women in terms of inches above the knee. I remember that our school uniforms were to be worn no higher than so many inches above the knee when kneeling. But these days there are other flashpoints. They may include super-tight teeshirts, bare midriffs, and really low-waisted jeans that are hardly edifying when seen from rear view. Semi-transparent shirts are another. Well, how do we recognize which are the risky items? By knowing clearly what modesty, what *not* drawing attention to our “less presentable” parts really means. Then, knowing that, having the discernment to see when types of fashionable garments actually do that. It also helps a lot to ask the men in our lives (husbands and fathers) to tell us what doesn't meet the standard. They ought to know. Also, ask discerning older women to discuss dress choices. This is invaluable. It requires some courage (on both parts), because appearance is a sensitive issue. But it is a mature thing to do.

What we're wearing inside

Now, having been really specific, I want to broaden the discussion again. You remember that both Paul and Peter said our dress should reflect our faith? That our best dress, so to speak, is the state of our hearts? Well, the best way to begin doing that is to make sure that what we wear doesn't scream of sin, or scream full stop. What do I mean by that? Well, we don't really want people to be

thinking when they see us, "Wow! What an amazing shiny electric blue shirt! Shows she's got a fantastic figure..." Or, "Man! Those red leather pants really stand out. You can't help but notice the length of her legs." Now, there's nothing *per se* wrong with electric blue or red, but what do we want people to remember about us? Surely it's not our chests or our legs, but things like the kindness of our heart, as reflected in the expression of our face. Someone once said that our clothes should not point to our "sexy" parts, but to our countenance (the expression of our face). I thought that was so apt. What helps people see our face? Clothes that suit our complexion well so that the overall effect is pleasing, but does not scream at the beholder. (Know your colours and choose well!) Dresses or shirts with a becoming neckline or collar detail that frame our face attractively so that people are drawn to it. I remember a good example of this from my teenage years. I was sitting having a conversation with my mother while she was going through her wardrobe. Suddenly I noticed a very nice-looking outfit I hadn't remembered her wearing before. I asked her what it was, and why we hadn't seen her wearing it recently. She explained that it was a top she had worn when expecting one of my younger sisters. Then we discussed what was so nice about it. It was navy blue with tiny white polka dots, a soft and flowing tunic-jacket. It had a big, wide white collar with some pretty trim around it. The reason for that sort of detail, she explained, is that it draws attention to the face and neck at a time when you have a huge middle, and you don't want everyone seeing that and not noticing the more important parts of you. I understood. Later, I thought of that conversation when it became the fashion for expectant mothers to wear dungarees, of all frightful garments! All you could see was a sort of Humpty-Dumpty figure with an enormous tummy and insignificant legs. Most unbecoming; and as I see now, quite immodest in the overall meaning of the word.

So, really, what we are aiming at in our dress choices is what will reflect a pure, lovely, godly inner self. If we grasp that idea, we've grasped the basics of modest dressing. The same principles apply in every age and culture, and are a sure guide to clothing ourselves wherever and whenever we live. If we can think of modesty in terms of drawing attention to Christ rather than to ourselves, we have the key.

* Jeff Pollard, *Christian Modesty: The Public Undressing of America* (The Vision Forum, 2003)

Books in focus

Rediscovering catechism

The art of equipping covenant children

Donald Van Dyken

Catechism is a familiar concept to those raised in Reformed and Presbyterian homes. However, Donald Van Dyken's book is a timely call for the church and home to rediscover the spiritual heritage of catechism instruction. This book reveals a deep love for the church and a pastoral heart for catechetically undernourished homes. It is also a timely reminder of the dire consequences of neglecting the training of the next generation as found in Judges 2:10-15 and Hosea 4:6-10.

Donald Van Dyken serves as minister of the Sunnyside Orthodox Christian Reformed Church in the state of Washington, which is the denomination that Rev. Leo De Vos served in prior to coming to NZ. He has taught catechism for over 20 years and is a contributing writer for Christian Renewal magazine.

After introducing his thesis and describing the context of the current climate in the church with respect to instruction, he sets out to explain the nature of confessions and the priority they have been given in the church. He then proceeds to explain the scriptural basis for church education programmes and the history of catechetical instruction in the church.

Over and above the content and argument of this book, its two appendices provide a rich resource for the parent or churchman seeking to select appropriate material for the work of catechizing. The first provides a brief outline and a suggested purchase location for a variety of both historical and contemporary confessions and catechisms. The second offers the reader a list of publishers and bookstores from which to access catechetical material. It is a very easy read of only 146 pages including the appendices and notes.

The cover of this book presents a picture of a pastor figure reading to a family gathered around a table. Donald VanDyken gives considerable time to discussing the way that the church and the home need to work together to ensure the best catechetical results. As the title of the book suggests he is also at pains to frame this book in a covenantal context by reminding the church that it is tasked with the responsibility of catechizing. He goes on to explain that "the elders fulfill their role by insisting and ensuring that the parents of the church obey God's command to instruct their children in His ways" (p.101).

The compelling and heartfelt call of this book will be warmly received by those already convicted of the need to catechize. For those individuals and churches unused to the concept of catechism the book sets forth the lasting benefit and generational heritage that catechism will bring to the church community devoted to the art of equipping its covenant children.

Reviewed by Andre Holtslag, one of our students studying for the ministry at Mid-America Reformed Seminary

This book is published by Presbyterian & Reformed and is available from Geneva Books, geneva.books@octaholdings.co.nz

Children in focus

Sonshine

Korner



The soldier's story

Read: Isaiah 53:3-6

The sombre black wall, engraved with rows and rows of names, filled Paul with awe. He was visiting Washington, D.C. with his family, and he was standing in front of the monument honouring those who had fought in Vietnam. All the names on the wall were of those who had died in that war.

A soldier stood near the wall, dressed in uniform, with medals on his chest. He seemed to be looking for something as he read the names. Then he placed a finger on one of the names and began tracing the letters. Over and over the soldier traced the letters of that name.

Curious, Paul edged closer. He was surprised to see tears on the soldier's cheeks. He hadn't imagined that a soldier would cry. The soldier noticed Paul, but feeling embarrassed, Paul backed away.

"It's all right, young man," said the soldier. "Let me explain the reason for these tears." He squatted down and looked Paul in the eye. "The name I was tracing belongs to a man who fought with me in Vietnam. We were together when a grenade landed right beside us. Glenn threw himself on top of it and took all the fury of the explosion. He died for me. Because of him, I'm alive today." The soldier gave Paul a trembling smile, and Paul felt tears filling his own eyes as he watched the soldier walk away.

Later, Paul told his parents what the soldier had said. "It must be a strange feeling, to know that somebody died to save your life," Paul added.

Dad nodded thoughtfully. "Actually, that happened to you, too," he said. "Someone did die to save you."

"When?" asked Paul in surprise. "Who did that?"

"The Lord Jesus did," replied Dad. "All that He suffered on the cross was for you, Paul. It was to pay for your sins, as well as for those of the whole world."

"Oh, that's right!" said Paul. "I guess I never thought of it that way before."

How about you?

Have you accepted the sacrifice that Jesus made for you? Unless you accept His death as payment for your sin, you will have to bear the fury of punishment yourself. By His death on the cross, Jesus took that punishment for you. If you've never asked Him to be Lord of your life and to forgive your sins, do it today.

Unscramble the text: "uBt eh asw ceeirpd orf uro gtanrsenenossri." aishal 53:5

Connect the dots by using the given Bible verse. (Matt 28:6)

He is

said, Matt 28:6 not here:

He as He For

risen, is

WORD SCRAMBLE SENTENCES:

(Unscramble the words to make a sentence)

1. sueJs eidd no eht ocsrcs orf em.
2. susJe swa reibud ni a tmob leadse thiw a sneto.
3. sesuJ eamc tuo fo eth motb.
4. I ma aknhtufl tath Jusse edid rof em.
5. suseJ si ym ordL nda Sovarui.

PRAYER:

Dear Heavenly Father,
 Thank you for sending your Son
 Who died on the cross for my sins
 To save my soul and make me whole.

Thank you, Jesus, for giving to me
 Thy great salvation
 So rich and free.
 In Your name, I pray.
 Amen

THE JELLY BEAN PRAYER

RED IS FOR THE BLOOD HE GAVE.
 GREEN IS FOR THE GRASS HE MADE.
 YELLOW IS FOR THE SUN SO BRIGHT.
 ORANGE IS FOR THE EDGE OF NIGHT.
 BLACK IS FOR THE SINS WE MADE.
 WHITE IS FOR THE GRACE HE GAVE.
 PURPLE IS FOR HIS HOUR OF SORROW.
 PINK IS FOR OUR NEW TOMORROW.

A JAR FULL OF JELLY BEANS
 COLORFUL AND SWEET,
 IS A PRAYER, IS A PROMISE,
 IS A SPECIAL TREAT

MAY THE JOY OF CHRIST'S
 RESURRECTION
 FILL YOUR HEART AND
 BLESS YOUR LIFE.



QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS...



The search is on
 the moment I can think
 Identity.....
 What is the link
 as back I look,
 and forward stare:
 What's in the air?

Who then am I
 and why?
 What purpose do I serve
 on planet earth?
 Where do I come from
 and where headed?
 Please tell, What is
 my destination?

Am I just merely
 a recycled soul,
 migrating from one body
 to another,
 my body just a coat
 put on and then discarded?
 Am I mere molecules
 of unknown origin
 and dusty destiny?

Or is the inner and the
 outer
 a united whole
 that spells out personality?
 Is there uniqueness
 and design
 that bears a
 signature divine?
 Is there a greater mind than
 mine,

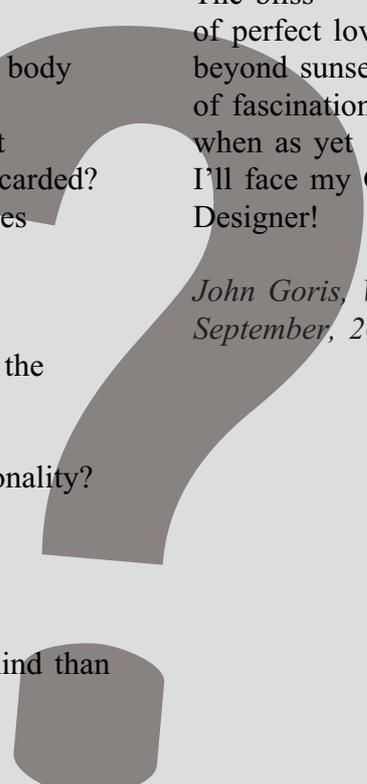
a greater heart I've hurt?
 Is there a way to know the
 truth?
 It's urgent: Life's but curt.

If right is wrong,
 and wrong is right;
 If light is darkness,
 darkness light:
 then *nothing* would have
 sense!

So do I live for *nothing*?
 Is heaven nothingness?

No rather, it is nothing less
 than unimaginable bliss!
 The bliss
 of perfect love
 beyond sunset,
 of fascination
 when as yet
 I'll face my Great
 Designer!

*John Goris, Wellington,
 September, 2004*



Focus on home

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Andrew Reinders

Avondale

Family Prayer & Praise Items. We congratulate Chris, Madeleine and the family with the birth of a healthy daughter, Cassandra Jane. Cassandra [it may be spelt incorrectly] was born last Tuesday morning. We give thanks to our heavenly Father for the gift of new life.

Family Devotional Thought: This morning we are especially blessed. We will witness the covenant sign of baptism given to Erian Standen. What does that mean? It means a number of things. First, because Emily is a Christian she, like all Christians, lives in a covenant relationship with God. The word 'covenant' is not widely used today, but it symbolises an agreement, or treaty. As Emily is a member of the treaty God has initiated with her, her children Riley and Erian are included in the agreement between God and Emily. Although Wayne has not yet professed his faith in Jesus, he is not left out of the picture. As we read in 1 Cor. 7:14; "For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy." Although we address the questions in the form for baptism to Emily, as a member of this congregation, we do ask Wayne to support his wife as she seeks to keep these vows. The sprinkling of water on the forehead of Erian is a visible sign and promise that this child is a member of God's covenant. And in that we rejoice. Rev. John Ter Horst – Pastor.

Last Friday morning the Lord God took home to Himself Mrs. Miep Stok. Hearts are saddened with the passing of Miep. Yet we are thankful that we do not need to doubt where she will spend eternity. Miep is in glory with her Saviour, and for that grace we are thankful, also through our tears. May God bless the family during this time.

We congratulate Herman & Issjah who last week celebrated their 40th. Wedding Anniversary. May our Lord grant them many

more years together.

We want to uphold in prayer before our loving God Simon van den Burg, who was the pilot involved in that terrible accident. At present he is still in hospital, [listed as serious] and at the time of writing this bulletin, we do not have much information concerning his condition. May the God of all comfort uphold the family during this time.

Bishopdale

Calling Committee: At our meeting last Tuesday we agreed to not call another minister until the new year and also to disband the present committee. The session will appoint a new committee at its February session meeting. Please continue to uphold the session in prayer in this important matter.

Christchurch

Prayer Meeting. A prayer meeting will be held at the church this Thursday evening, beginning at 7:30. We will be singing a few songs, reading the Bible, and of course, raising matters for prayer and praying together to praise God and to lay before Him the needs of our families and members, our church, our nation, and our world. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to attend.

Dovedale

Dovedale Church camp 2005. Yes, we realise it is still ages away, but for all of you who like to do some year planning over the summer holidays, we thought it is helpful to put the dates in the bulletin again. Camp is on from 15-17th 2005 of April at Glenroy Lodge (DV). Consider being involved this year in some way or other. It really is great fun! People are needed to help in the kitchen and with the children's activities. Ideas are circulating for the study theme but all great suggestions are most welcome. Hope to see you there, Arjen and Jantina Buter.

Dunedin

Our 50th Anniversary. As most of you are aware our church will, on 26 June 2005, DV, observe the fiftieth anniversary of her institution. To mark that occasion we will have a celebratory dinner on Saturday 25 June for members from Dunedin, Oamaru and country districts. Former members, ministers and their wives have also been invited. The celebrations will start at 3:00 pm, and we intend to finish at about 9:00 pm to enable all to be home at a reasonable

time, especially those from out of town. We have been able to hire the Green Island Civic Hall for this occasion and also to engage caterers to look after our dinner and the cleaning up. In order to make it possible for all families of our congregations to attend, Session has decided that the full costs will be met initially from church finances. However those attending will be given an opportunity to make a donation to recover some of the costs. Our celebration will be, first and foremost, an occasion to reflect on and rejoice in the faithfulness, grace and mercy that the King of the Church has bestowed on us over the past fifty years. To that end, we invite groups and individuals to provide items of entertainment. Ladies' fellowship, seniors, home groups, youth group, musicians, singers, storytellers, etc, please start thinking and preparing for a great time of fellowship. Please advise our presenter, John van Dyk, so he can prepare a complete and worthwhile programme. We are also looking for old photographs and items of memorabilia that you may have in your albums and/or shoeboxes. Our celebrations will conclude with a worship service of thanksgiving on Sunday 26 June at 10:00 am, and we trust that the Oamaru congregation will be able to join us for that occasion. For and on behalf of the committee. Peter Braam

Foxton

Scripture Readers. At our recent Session meeting it was pointed out that most of our men folk who are expected to lead their families and the church in years to come have very little opportunity to read the Scriptures in a public forum. So Session has decided to use volunteer readers during our evening worship services as a way of encouragement. This will begin in the New Year. Session has also decided that the volunteer readers should be communicant members and clear readers. We look forward to receiving some volunteers. Please see the Pastor if you would like to be included.

Today is the last Sunday when we have opportunity to gather together for worship this year. Let me say from the outset that Session and certainly yours truly have been tremendously encouraged and thankful by the faithful attendance to both worship services in this congregation. Perhaps it's appropriate to give yourselves a 'pat on the back' for I know that it takes a certain amount of commitment to attend every Sunday. Yes, yes, I know, we don't do that for we all know it is a privilege and it's only by God's grace

that we can attend. Yet, reality is that sometimes it would be just nice to stay at home and relax – at least just once. For some people, Sunday can become the busiest day of the week. Now coming to worship once or even twice is a good discipline and I don't want to discourage it for a moment. In "reformed" circles we pride ourselves on coming twice to worship on a Sunday but how do we encourage those who do not with the right reasons and with the right incentive. I have heard of elders and ministers quoting the Church Order as an incentive for attending twice [RCNZ Art 53 CRCA Art 58] but that is really inappropriate, for both these articles instruct Sessions to make sure there is opportunity to worship twice and doesn't really say anything about members attending. Others like to quote the confessions, particularly the authority of the office of elder. "If the elder says so, then you must do it, after all as communicant members you have agreed to abide by the instruction of the elders." Again, this may be a valid approach, but if people have to come to worship because the elder has used the authority of his office and instructed them to do so, than it is a pretty poor reason. Perhaps a warning is also appropriate at this point. We know that coming once or even twice for that matter will not guarantee our salvation, however, we also know that if we never come or seldom come, then we are going to become impoverished. Just as we may not always know how the daily meals we eat sustain us, we can be assured they do, even if they are not all equally tasty and scrumptious. So does the Word of God when proclaimed faithfully. So what's the right reason for attendance? I am sure you know. My prayer is that the reason you come to worship and will continue to do so is to meet with God and to feed on his Word and to have Christian fellowship with saved sinners like your self. How can we not do so in light of what our Father in heaven has done for us in Christ? So as we move into the year of our Lord, 2005, let us encourage one another to meet together, all the more, for the day of the Lord's appearing is closer than it was yesterday. JZ

Hamilton

Welcome And Congratulations! A baby girl was born last Wednesday to Walter and Jeanice Van den Engel. Her name is Grace Annelies. Mother and Babe are doing fine.

Pastoral: Last Monday Kristina and Arend de Jong became the proud and grateful parents of twin boys Bryce Allan and Darryl John. Mother and boys are doing fine.

Pastoral: This week we may rejoice with 2 couples in celebrating our Lord's faithfulness

for keeping them in His care. Hearty congratulations to Joop and Sannie Termaat on their 30th Wedding anniversary tomorrow! Not less hearty congratulations to Gerrit and Margriet ten Heuw on their 50th wedding anniversary this coming Friday the 14th !

Hukanui

Eventide Singing. You are invited to join the youth at Tamahere Eventide Resthome for an hour of old-time classics and favourite hymns. Meet in the carpark at 1:45pm on Sunday, 5 December. We'll sing with the residents from 2pm to 2:45pm. Please call Paula (829-4575) for more details.

50th Wedding Anniversary Celebrations. Hugo & Dorothy van Woerden invite their friends to celebrate their 50th Wedding Anniversary with them on Sat. 1 Jan. at John & Jenny's home, 301 Waitekauri Rd, Waihi, between 10am and 3pm.

A warm welcome also to Rev Harry and Anne Hoving, visiting family and friends in New Zealand yet again. Rev Hoving has kindly agreed to lead us in worship this evening and we pray God will speak mightily through you.

Mangere

Pastoral. On Friday morning the Lord took to Himself, suddenly, our Sr Rie Posthuma. We are thankful for her life of faith and that her soul is now with her Saviour and Lord in heaven. We don't mourn as those without

hope. We pray now that the Lord would be with Br Tom Posthuma, with the children – Yvonne and Tony, Graeme & Jackie, Sharon & Graham, and Jacqueline & Simon – and the grandchildren, including Jeremy, Michael, Amy and Nicola. A dear wife, mum and Oma is physically no longer with them, yet her influence will stay with them. (Please note that the burial service will take place this coming Tuesday at 1.00pm at the Manukau Cemetery, followed by a service at the church at 2.00pm.)

Masterton

Rev Sikkema: As previously mentioned Rev and Mrs Sikkema will be arriving on Thursday 2 December. Rev Sikkema is a retired minister in the United Reformed Church and is currently residing in the congregation of St Catherine. He is an active member of the ICRC and the Inter Church Relations Committee of the URC. He comes to us with recommendations from both the Canadian Reformed Churches and fellow pastors of the URC as well as Revs Leo de Vos and Goris. Because he is not from a sister church he will have a brief Colloquium Doctum by members of the Presbytery on Friday 10 December DV.

Pastoral Notes: We rejoice with the De Vries family in the safe arrival of a healthy son, Darren born on Thursday. Praise God for His continued blessing on us as a congregation. Pray for our sister Lammie as she recovers from the birth.

Martyrs Remembered

On October 21, 2004, a memorial ceremony was held at the BCNZ (Bible College of New Zealand) to remember the lives of five graduates who were martyred during mission service overseas. Two of the martyrs were OMF (Overseas Missionary Fellowship) missionaries, Minka Hanskamp and Roy Orpin.

Minka Hanskamp (1922-1974) was born in Holland, grew up in Indonesia, and later emigrated to New Zealand.

During the Japanese invasion of Indonesia in World War II, her family was separated and sent to internment camps. Minka saved many lives as a nurse in a camp and was reunited with her family after being released.

She then emigrated to New Zealand in 1953 and was accepted to serve with OMF in Thailand having graduated from the BCNZ. There she worked as a midwife in a hospital for 10 years and then moved to the Pujud rural leprosy mission.

During growing guerilla activity in 1974, she and another nurse were held at gunpoint, with their Malay captors demanding OMF pay a ransom of 10 million baht and write official letters of protest against Israel. Almost a year after their capture their bodies were found in the jungle.

In recognition of these martyrs, a tree has been planted and a plaque laid for each one at the College's Auckland campus.

Minka Hanskamp was a member of the Bucklands Beach Reformed Presbyterian Church, on whose behest she took up service on the mission field. This item was taken from OMF New Zealand News, December/January 2005.

Wedding Banns: Benjamin Earl Hoyt and Francis-Marie Voges have indicated their desire to be united in marriage. If there are no lawful objections, the wedding will take place, the Lord willing, this Saturday the 15th of January in Christchurch. May the Lord grant this couple grace to fulfil the vows they will make before God and men, and enable Ben and Francie in their relationship to reflect the relationship and communion between Christ and His church.

Men's Prayer Meeting: All men in the congregation are invited to attend a men's prayer meeting being held tomorrow at Stolte Jnr's place at 7:45. A fortnightly prayer meeting was started at the end of last year where men of the congregation met together to bring before the throne of grace the needs of the world, society, church and those things that affect us as men seeking to be God honouring leaders and examples in our homes. If you would like to attend but you're a bit apprehensive about praying that's all right too, nobody is made to pray (as long as you pray in your heart with us). Just remember before you come to prepare yourself and your heart to meet Him in prayer.

North Shore

Frank and Rachel are delighted to announce the arrival of their beautiful, healthy daughter Allannah Mariesa Grace den Hartigh. She was born on Wednesday, the 24th of November, weighing 2.7kg (6.1 lb) and measuring 43 cm in length. "The LORD has done great things for us and we are filled with joy." Psalm 126:3 "You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever." (Psalm 30:11-12.)

We are not going to make a habit of having a Church lunch every second Sunday, but, not only is Hannah Reeve going to be married in two weeks' time, the knight in shining armour is sweeping her off to Christchurch! And, since Hannah has been part of this congregation since she was two years old, we had better farewell her appropriately. So, another Church lunch next Sunday, 5th December. An autograph book is doing the rounds, so please fill in a page for your family. Please bring a plate.

Wedding Banns: It is with joy that we can

announce the wedding of Joshua Flinn and Hannah Reeve. If no lawful objections are raised, this will take place, the Lord willing, on Friday, December 10th at 3 pm.

A few weeks ago you were notified of the Korean Reformed Presbyterian Church meeting in our church building each Sunday afternoon. The youth group of this church will be meeting in the church each Saturday afternoon from 1 till 4.30 pm, using various rooms in the building. Please take note of this if you use the church in any way on Saturdays (eg cleaning).

Gerard and Betty Strydom celebrated their 50th Wedding Anniversary on Friday. That is quite a milestone and we offer you both our hearty congratulations. It is also an example to the rest of us and something to give God thanks for. May the Lord enable all of us married couples to be likewise faithful and thus provide stable homes for our children and a bit of stability in this shaky world he has called us to live in.

Palmerston North

Senior Citizens Annual Fellowship Afternoon. This is an annual event that our Congregation has hosted since 1979 – this year is the 25 year silver anniversary. The elderly in our community are collected from their homes or retirement homes for an afternoon and returned at the end of the day. We have a program of singing, a devotion, afternoon tea, cutting of cake and fellowship, and a gift is given at the end of the day. Many of these folk happily anticipate the afternoon and it is a wonderful opportunity to show Christ's love to our community and people. Al and Sonja.

Thought For The Week - Helen Keller (1880-1968). I am only one; but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; I will not refuse to do the something I can do.

Congratulations to Lee and Graham and boys, on the birth of a daughter and sister, Ivanna Mary, 7lb 8oz, on Wednesday at 10.20am. May the Lord bless you greatly as you raise Ivanna and the boys for Him.

90th Birthday Celebration for Marietje Jochem. Shared lunch next week 28th November. We would like to celebrate the 90th birthday of our Mother and Oma with the congregation with a shared lunch next week after the morning service. Please bring a plate of finger food to share to add to the lunch provided. The Jochem family.

Pukekohe

Next year the pastor will lead weekly services in Franklin Village and in the Pukekohe

IN TOUCH

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

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

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



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

Geriatric Hospital in the months of May and September respectively as part of the local minister's association roster for these homes.

Silverstream

Building Committee. Reminder to all members of the congregation of the information evening to be held at the church hall Monday 20th December 7:45pm. We will be presenting the concept plan for the new building project with a booklet to be handed out. If you cannot make this meeting and want your booklet please see one of the committee members. Could families LMNOP please bring a plate for supper. Thank you. Jim, Harry, Gerald, Daniel, Bill VDZ, Edwin

We give thanks for the birth of Jack William Wellwood, to Peter and Diana, on Wednesday. Mother and child are doing well, according to our prayers.

Tim and Rachel and little baby Alex are now in their fifth week in Wellington hospital. Last Wednesday Alex had a blood transfusion, a consequence of his recent operation, and is now doing reasonably well. We continue to

pray that Alex may improve sufficiently to be able to be moved to the Hutt Valley hospital – and from there, eventually home. We also give thanks that the Lord is enabling Tim and Rachel to keep looking to Him in trust.

Wainuiomata

Christmas Singing & Fellowship Dinner. On Sunday the 19th after the afternoon service we will have a fellowship dinner followed at 7.00 pm with our Christmas singing and fellowship evening. We will again be inviting the Wellington and Silverstream congregations to join us for the singing and supper afterwards. We will also be putting an advert in the Wainui News for anyone to join us, so please invite your neighbours and friends along also. Please keep this time free in your diaries.

Wellington

Open Home. You are all cordially invited to an open home at Leen and Anneke van Vliets on Saturday 4th of December from 1-4 pm to celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary. We would love to see you there.

Church Centenary. Next Sunday 12th Dec. at 3.00pm, there will be a service of thanksgiving to mark 100 years this church building has been in the Brooklyn area. (Our usual service at 4.30pm is cancelled). There will also be an opportunity to view photos and browse through papers dating back to the first AGM 1904. Followed by Tea and coffee. Ladies please bring a plate.

Thank you. I would like to thank the congregation for their support and encouragement

over the last weeks since Henk's passing. It is a great comfort to belong to the Lord and to feel the comfort of His people. Lyn Conege and family.

Next Sunday. Our annual dedication service will be held in the morning service, both for teachers in the various classes and the taught. However, this year we add another dimension, in that as students of the Word we all need to be dedicated.

An internet anecdote

A university professor challenged his students with this question. "Did God create everything that exists?"

A student bravely replied, "Yes, He did!"

"God created everything?" The professor asked.

"Yes sir," the student replied.

The professor answered, "If God created everything, then God created evil, since evil exists and according to the principal that our works define who we are then God is evil."

The student became quiet before such an answer.

The professor was quite pleased with himself and boasted to the students that he had proven once more that the Christian faith was a myth.

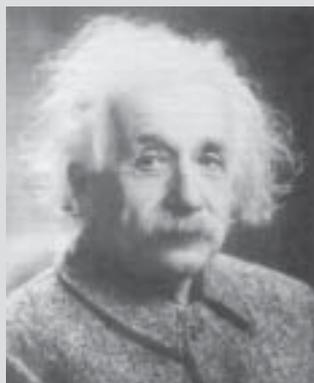
Another student raised his hand and said, "Can I ask you a question, professor?"

"Of course," replied the professor.

The student stood up and asked, "Professor, does cold exist?"

"What kind of question is this? Of course it exists. Have you never been cold?" The students snickered at the young man's question.

The young man replied, "In fact, sir, cold does not exist. According to the laws of physics, what we consider cold is in reality the absence of heat. Every body or object is susceptible to study when it has or transmits energy, and heat is what makes a body or matter have or transmit energy. Absolute zero (-460 degrees F) is the total absence of heat; all matter becomes inert and incapable of reaction at that



temperature. Cold does not exist. We have created this word to describe how we feel if we have no heat."

The student continued. "Professor, does darkness exist?"

The professor responded, "Of course it does."

The student replied, "Once again you are wrong sir, darkness does not exist either. Darkness is in reality the absence of light. Light we can study, but not darkness. In fact we can use Newton's prism to break white light into many colors and study the various wavelengths of each color. You cannot measure darkness. A simple ray of light can break into a world of darkness and illuminate it. How can you know how dark a certain space is? You measure the amount of light present. Isn't this correct? Darkness is a term used by man to describe what happens when there is no light present."

Finally the young man asked the professor. "Sir, does evil exist?"

Now uncertain, the professor responded, "Of course as I have already said. We see it every day. It is in the daily example of man's inhumanity to man. It is in the multitude of crime and violence everywhere in the world. These manifestations are nothing else but evil."

To this the student replied, "Evil does not exist, sir, or at least it does not exist unto itself. Evil is simply the absence of God. It is just like darkness and cold, a word that man has created to describe the absence of God. God did not create evil. Evil is not like faith, or love that exist just as does light and heat. Evil is the result of what happens when man does not have God's love present in his heart. It's like the cold that comes when there is no heat or the darkness that comes when there is no light."

The professor sat down.

The young man's name – Albert Einstein.

This was taken from Christian Renewal, with whom we have a reciprocal arrangement.

Code Blue World-view Conference 2005

Following on from the success of the World-view Conference of April 2002 the same Committee organised a further conference for January 18-21, 2005.

While the first conference set a strong biblical framework, this conference challenged us to live this out in every area of life. R.C. Sproul (Jr) was a capable keynote speaker and addressed how the devil's strategy to offer alternative world views has worked in the past and what he is doing in using today's postmodernism/relativism. The battle lines were drawn out further in subsequent talks with the attractions of this world, the busyness of this world, and the pragmatism of this world, all brought out in stark contrast to God's Word. He ended by challenging us to take every thought captive, as per 2nd Corinthians 10 verse 5, and how our presuppositions play an important part in this. There was good involvement from the audience, with R.C. himself acknowledging that a certain inconsistency in his own perspective was being shown up (his love of a certain American sports code!). If you would want to look up further the substance of the talks a good place to begin would be R.C.'s book, *Tearing Down Strongholds and Defending the Truth*, (published by Presbyterian & Reformed).

The theme of the Conference was supported by local speakers - Paul Henderson from the Maxim Institute on worldviews in the current political scene in New Zealand; Michael Drake on 'The Christian Worldview and Maori Culture,' Isaac Botkin on how specific worldviews have become enmeshed in our culture through media, and Lewis Meyer on 'The Creation Factor'. The participants were further challenged by having to debate a specific subject through an assigned speaker.

While the Conference was organised by home schooling parents it was open to many from the wider Christian education field, as was seen in those who were there.

My thanks go to the Committee. It was a good time of fellowship and learning.



R.C. Sproul (Jr)



Those who attended the Worldview Conference