

faith in **focus**

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Amusing ourselves to death? ...
The Christian and leisure

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

The Editor:

Walter Walraven
7 Winchester Avenue, Pinehaven
Upper Hutt 5019
Email: fnf@rcnz.org.nz
Reformed Churches Home Page
<http://www.rcnz.org.nz>

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Mrs Nicola Wharekawa
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Email: ricwhare@paradise.net.nz

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Editorial

Whether we like it or not, 21st century Christians are very much caught up in the the amusements that our age has to offer. There are movies, television, Playstation and Xbox, sport, sport and more sport. Oh and just in case I missed anything out, there is

I remember in the early days of my conversion an elder and his wife in my church asked if I would stay at their place after lunch until the afternoon service. My reply was that I was going to the squash club for a competition that afternoon and wouldn't be there. The elder's response was pretty forthright. He suggested that I didn't understand God's requirement and provision for me on the Lord's Day and that the devil would use this pursuit of excellence in sport to harm me spiritually. I wasn't amused. Playing squash was very important to me and I had dedicated a lot of time to it. After some time I came to grips with what the Lord had given to me and to his people in that first day of the week and agreed that I should be diligent to observe it out of thankfulness for His salvation in Jesus Christ, and as a means of rest for both body and soul.

Our four contributors have combined their efforts wonderfully to present three articles and a review which look at whether or not we are "amusing ourselves to death". I found them compelling reading and recommend them to our readers.

Mr Andrew de Vries looks at the biblical view of and necessity for rest.

Mr John van Dyk writes about hobbies. Are they beneficial or do they detract from God's glory?

Mr Andre Holtslag muses about our sport-mad society and considers how far we are caught up in it.

Mr John Haverland reviews Neil Postman's book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, and writes about television viewing.

Mrs Sally Davey gives some thought to the ways women could use their spare time.

Mr William Boekestein, who is pastor of Covenant Reformed Church in Carbondale, PA (URCNA) blogs about God's discipline of his people; focusing on Hebrews 12.

Mr Jack Sawyer give us the second instalment of "*The Glorious New Zealand Experiment*" (from the book *Confident of Better Things*, by the OPC) and relates how many of our early ministers were from the USA.

Mrs Harriet Haverland keeps us informed about some of our goings on in the Gleanings column.

Finally, on behalf of the *Faith in Focus* team, I hope you enjoy and derive some spiritual blessing from this issue.

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Amusing ourselves to death? ...

The Christian and leisure (1)

Come to me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest

Andrew de Vries

If the word 'rest' were a food, I wonder how it would taste to you? To some, it would taste very sour. To the five-year-old who is running at full speed from the moment he gets up at 6am to the moment his battery finally gives way, rest is oppressive. To the businessman who has a career to pursue and who doesn't know what to do on a family holiday, rest is an unwanted intruder. Yet to others, rest is a sweet word. To the teenager who has discovered that university life gives unlimited freedoms to sleep in, rest becomes his closest companion. To the busy mother who is on the job 24/7, rest is as important as oxygen. What is your view of rest? Sweet, or sour? Or perhaps you have another sense of taste you would use to describe your view of rest. Whatever your taste of rest may be, I have no doubt that your palate could do with some education on the biblical view of rest.

Rest is not a dirty word

Rest is woven into the fabric of life by the Lord himself. At times, we simply must cease from our normal daily activities to rest: that is how we have been created. Ask any new parents who are chronically sleep deprived, and they will tell you through blood-shot eyes how they long for a full night's sleep. However, it is not just our experience of life that tells us that rest is necessary. The Lord himself weaves into the rhythm of our 7 day week one day on which we are commanded to rest (Exodus 20:8-11). Some people feel oppressed by this command to cease from their labours. They long for liberation from what they perceive as a restrictive command. But put yourself in the sandals of an Israelite who's just received this command. You have come out of slavery in Egypt where you are treated as if you are a working machine. If you asked one of

these Israelites what their weekend was like, they would have looked at you with astonishment and said 'what's a weekend'? They didn't have a chance to enjoy rest when they were slaves in Egypt. So the fourth commandment was not a slap in the face to them, but a refreshing stream of life-giving water. Rest is not a dirty word for the Christian. It is the Christian's delight!

However, this day of rest is not just satisfying the physical need we have to down tools. It is also a day for spiritual rest. When we rest, we follow the pattern of God himself when he rested after the six days of creation (Gen 2:2,3). The Lord certainly did not need a break from his work because he was tired. His rest was a delightful contemplation of all the works his hands had made. So on our day of rest, we are freed from the ordinary demands of daily life so that we can have the same delightful contemplation of all the Lord's works, especially his great work of redemption (Deut 5:15 makes this connection explicit for the Israelites). Most of us don't have much of a problem with ceasing from work on

the Lord's Day. But we struggle with the other side of the coin, contemplation and communion with the Lord on this day of rest. The Lord's Day is quickly filled up with having family lunches, or perfecting that golf swing, or catching up on the latest movies, or preparing the job list for the week ahead, or making sure we are prepared for the next exam. When we do this we miss out on the spiritual feast our Lord intends for us on the day of rest. We think we are finding rest from the burdens of our daily lives, but instead we are rejecting the Lord's gracious invitation: 'Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.' (Matt 11:28).

Everybody's working for the weekend

Perhaps you have a spiritual taste for the rest and recreation of the Lord's Day, but you are worried about indulging those tastes on other days? Is it permissible to seek refreshment on a day other than Sunday? Well, if you sleep during the week, you are already engaging in rest and recreation on a day other than the



Lord's Day. We should take note of the example of Jesus. Jesus himself took time for a retreat from his active life, presumably on days other than the Sabbath (Mark 6:45-47, Luke 6:12, 9:28). He also told his disciples to do the same thing (Mark 6:31). Although one could argue that Jesus was at the wedding at Cana in Galilee to work (John 2), at least one of the implications of his presence there was that he also engaged in the rest and recreation offered at a wedding. Jesus actually went to enough parties to be accused of being a glutton and drunkard (Matt 11:19, Luke 7:34). And if anyone knew how to enjoy refreshment and recreation during the week, wasn't it the Israelites? God gave them a whole system of festivals and feasts in which they could rest from their work, socialise, eat, and enjoy worship. Can you imagine how many public holidays they had? In addition to the Lord's Day, we are given the liberty to decide how we rest and recreate during the week.

Perhaps a better question than when, is what do you think about rest and recreation? Some people think it is the ultimate thing in life. You ask them on Monday how they are going, and they grumble about being back to the grindstone. On Wednesday they pick up a bit and talk about being over the hump. And on Friday they start to resemble a human being and they can't stop talking about what they will do on the weekend. They live for rest and recreation. We see the same thought pattern emerge in modern views of retirement. The ultimate aim today for the working man or woman is

to retire as early as possible so that they can enjoy as much rest and recreation as possible. These are hardly biblical ideals. Rest and recreation are to be received and enjoyed as gifts from God's hand (Ecc 5:18). However, they are not the ultimate goal and aim of our existence. Our ultimate goal is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. We are to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. It is through our rest and recreation that we are better equipped to do just that. Are you living for the weekend? Or is your rest and recreation the means by which you are recalibrated by the will of God and reinvigorated to serve the Lord?

Baking cookies to the glory of God

The final question to consider is 'what constitutes Christian rest and recreation?' Some might say that Christian rest and recreation are limited to such activities as hymn singing, playing 'sacred music', reading Berkhof's systematic theology, and listening to sermons on monergism.com. The problem with this view is that it draws a sharp dividing line between activities that are considered spiritual, and those activities which are non-spiritual, or secular. We often do this when we talk about a person's job. We think the missionary is doing a very spiritual job, but the car salesman or the carpenter is doing something sub-spiritual. They are just not on the same level. But the Bible doesn't draw a sharp dividing line between different areas of life. The Bible teaches that all of life is spiritual. Paul reminds us that whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we are to do

it all for the glory of God (I Cor 10:31). That includes any recreational activity, whether it be 'spiritual activities' such as singing psalms or reading, or whether it is the so called 'ordinary activities' like tramping the Abel Tasman, planting out a new garden, or baking cookies.

So a good test of whether your recreation is godly or not is to ask 'does it glorify God?' Does it glorify God to watch the R-rated movie that contains all kinds of immorality? Does it glorify God to curse the screen as you try and master your latest computer game? Does it glorify God that you are out on the tramping track rather than with his people on the Lord's Day? Does it glorify God to still be in bed at 10am as you sleep off another late night? Does it glorify God to sing along with the latest pop sensation whose lyrics would make your grandmother blush? Does it glorify God to be overly competitive in soccer or volleyball competitions? You might find these activities very restful, they might be pleasurable for you, but if they don't glorify God then they are not valid forms of Christian recreation.

Although there is no split between sacred and secular recreational activities, there is a difference in the quality of recreational activities we might engage in. There is recreational junk food on the one hand, and there is a recreational fine dining on the other. For example, many of us read books as a form of recreation. We find it refreshing and invigorating. However, what kind of books do you read? Some books have a way of extending the mind, elevating the soul, shaping the will, sharpening the conscience, and nourishing the believing heart. And other books do nothing of the sort. There is a difference in quality between a daily devotional and the works of Calvin or Edwards. There is a quality difference between *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Tabletalk* magazine. There is a quality difference between a fictional romance novel and a world-class biography. I will let the reader discern which is recreational junk food and which is fine dining. My point is this: we need to be wise in the choices we make in our recreation. Perhaps the prayer of Paul needs to be on our lips more often '...that we may be able to discern what is best...' (Philippians 1:10).

Mr Andrew de Vries is one of the Ministers of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Bishopdale.



Amusing ourselves to death? ...

The Christian and leisure (2)

Making good hobby choices

John van Dyk

For as long as people have had time on their hands, they have been engaging in hobbies. The Apostle Paul knew all about hobbies and he occasionally made reference to them – sometimes favourably, other times not – in his letters. The following list is, admittedly, a little tongue in cheek.

- Astronomy – “shine like the stars in the sky” (Phil. 2:15).
- Ceramics – “does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay ...” (Rom. 9:21).
- Athletics – “run in such a way as to get the prize” (1 Cor. 9:24).
- Viticulture – “use a little wine” (1 Tim. 5:23).
- Sightseeing – “as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship” (Acts 17:23).
- Calligraphy – “see what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand” (Gal. 6:11).
- Coin collecting, however, doesn't seem to have the Pauline stamp of approval – “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim. 6:10)!

Casting the net wider to take in the whole of Scripture would yield a much lengthier list that could potentially include examples like gemstone collecting, baking, needlework, bee-keeping, animal husbandry, mountaineering and reading.

The online reference site Wikipedia boasts a list of more than 500 hobbies not including sports. The list includes really useful activities such as home repair and cooking; not-so-useful activities that look as though they could be fun (such as model rocketry or geo-caching); and other activities, such as sun-tanning and sleeping, whose inclusion on the list is rather dubious to say the least.

Hobbies defined

So what exactly is a hobby? The consensus among several dictionaries I consulted is that a hobby is an activity or

interest that is pursued for pleasure or relaxation and not as a main occupation. Therefore developing computer software may be a hobby for you but isn't for me as it's my main occupation. I could claim home renovation as a hobby even though for someone else it is their means of earning a living. But not every spare-time activity is a hobby. Mowing lawns or washing dishes for most of us isn't a hobby because we do these tasks out of necessity, not for pleasure.

What about church and church activities (included on Wikipedia's list), are they hobbies? We need to remember that worshipping and serving God, in response to his love to us in Christ, is our highest calling. As such it ranks above our main occupation. Even though they afford us much pleasure and consolation,

church and church activities cannot be described as hobbies.

Are hobbies appropriate?

The next question is whether hobbies, or even leisure, are an appropriate use of time for the Christian. The designation of the Sabbath, or latterly the Lord's Day, as a day of rest and worship is universally accepted among believers. But what about hobby and leisure time on the other six days? For the answer we need to go back to Genesis, to the Garden of Eden before the Fall. All that God created, including man as its pinnacle, was very good. God was pleased with the work of his hands and he intended that man should share in that pleasure. In charging man to rule over the lesser creatures, to fill the earth and subdue it,

“The Christian must be extremely careful to keep a strong sense of proportion over time spent on hobbies and leisure ...”



God confirmed that intention. After the Fall, however, the consequences of sin were spelled out. Wringing out a living was going to be hard work, involving an ongoing battle against opposing natural forces. The pains of childbirth would be exacerbated.

Yet, in all of this, God did not entirely deprive fallen man of the pleasure of living in his creation. Nor would the demands of work necessarily become a dawn-to-dusk activity. In addition to the workaday routine it seems clear that there would be some residue of discretionary time. That hobbies are a legitimate way to spend some of that discretionary time is borne out by specific biblical examples of leisure time activities as well as a few guiding principles. In 1 Kings 4:29–34 we read of Solomon composing proverbs, writing songs, and studying plant and animal life. The Apostle Paul, in 1 Timothy 4:8, concedes that physical training has some value, although godliness has value for all things.



Glorifying God in our hobbies

And therein lies the rub. The pursuit of the temporal has a little value while the pursuit of the spiritual has value for eternity. The Christian must be extremely careful to keep a strong sense of proportion over time spent on hobbies and leisure compared to time spent on weightier matters. We must consider how to apply 1 Corinthians 10:31 to our hobby time: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” Is our matchbox collecting, basketball shooting practice, computer gaming, model ship-building, magazine reading or whatever done to the glory of God? There are some ways that our hobbies could clearly be used to God’s glory. In particular, these might include practical hobbies that are used to help others, activities that allow useful contact with those who are not yet believers, hobbies that focus our attention on the wonders of God’s creation or allow us to marvel at the gifts and abilities he has given to man. Indeed if we take the view of thankfulness to the Lord for leisure opportunities and appreciation of the constructive ways the time may be used, then glory to God already begins to accrue.

Poor hobby choices

Conversely, there are many ways in which hobbies can detract from God’s glory. Some hobbies are, in and of themselves, not suitable for the Christian. Activities such as yoga and many of the martial arts, for example, would not be suitable for the Christian as they are based on their own (false) worldview. A recently published memoir describing the author’s experiences in the tango dancing world¹ serves as another example which should sound alarm bells for the Christian reader. Tango seems to provide a fleeting release from life’s pain and pleasure in an emotionally intense dance which can become almost narcotically addictive. Similarly, hobbies which require wholesale participation in a morally suspect subculture (the theatre sometimes, or the social aspects of many sports) should be steered clear of.

Pitfalls to avoid

Perhaps the greatest danger that hobbies present is to engage us in a disproportionate amount of our time and become too great a focus in our life. It is all too easy to let the time we spend on our spare-time pursuits creep up and impinge on time for the Lord, family, church and work. Worse still is the possibility of

hobbies taking over our focus in life. It’s poor form to ensure the various demands on our time are each given their share if we do this only out of a sense of duty. To paraphrase Matthew 16:26, what good is it if a person becomes a leading exponent of their chosen hobby, yet forfeits their soul?

The other great danger of hobbies is the potential misuse of our financial resources in satisfying their demands. Club membership fees, travel, raw materials, costs of building up a collection of one kind or another – these too can detract from what ought properly to be devoted to God, the needy and our families.

The pleasure paradox

There is an interesting hypothesis called the pleasure paradox which asserts that happiness or pleasure cannot be acquired directly; it can only be attained by indirect means. A model railway enthusiast, for example, will not likely agree that he dabbles with trains as a means of gaining pleasure. No, he just likes playing with trains. In the same way, if you heard that model railway was very pleasurable, and began playing with trains as a means of pursuing happiness, it would inevitably be in vain. This thinking is confirmed and taken a step further by the writer of Ecclesiastes. True happiness is only possible in the context of a right relationship with God, knowing his forgiveness and care for the sinner, and appreciating that he is the author of all that is good and enjoyable in this world.

God, through Scripture, demands that we remain on track with many, many references as to our primary calling and focus in life. Whether it is being warned not to serve two masters, being transformed by the renewal of our minds, loving the Lord our God with all of our beings, presenting our bodies as living sacrifices, we are reminded time and again to seek God and his kingdom first and to keep earthly considerations in their proper place.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things (Phil. 4:8).

Notes

¹ Kapka Kassabova: *Twelve Minutes of Love: A Tango Story*, 2011

Mr John van Dyk is a member of the Reformed Church of Dunedin.

Amusing ourselves to death? ...

The Christian and leisure (3)

Sport for His glory?

Andre Holtslag

I once went to three days of a five-day test match at the Basin Reserve in Wellington. A good number of us will remember getting up at 3am each year towards the end of May to watch the F.A. Cup final from Wembley. And then there are the countless hours spent playing backyard or beach cricket with its unusual rules like 'one hand, one bounce.' There is the scoreboard section of the newspaper, which keeps us up-to-date with MLB, NRL, EPL, NFL, A-League, NBA, MLS, Eredivisie, NPC, NBL, Super 15, NHL, and PGA results and standings, as well as ESPN Score-center and Cricinfo apps for those who cannot wait for tomorrow's paper. And, for those who can afford it (or not!), Satellite TV offers five channels of 24-hour sport and MySky HDi so you can record what you cannot watch for viewing later on. We have Wii-Fit and Xbox so we can play sport in the lounge on TV. On Saturday mornings, most Kiwi kids can be found either at the netball courts or playing fields, with further mid-week opportunities for sports like volleyball or canoe-polo or chess, all of which require dedicated parents to fulfill the taxi duties and to hand out the Powerade at half-time. And who can forget the nervous tension and national euphoria either side of 10:44pm on the 23rd October last year?

Is sports a major part of life today? You-betcha!

And we would be foolish not to acknowledge the benefits of sport. It can teach lofty ideals such as strength of character, working in a team, the importance of rules, discipline, perseverance, losing with grace, and good sportsmanship, as well as providing living examples of the opposite of these things. For examples of these things we need only think of 'that underarm incident' or the story of Eric Liddell from the movie *Chariots of Fire*. In addition, as we participate, sport provides a ready made network for evangelistic opportunities. Regardless

of whether we are playing, standing on the sidelines, coaching, or involved in administration, we are in contact with those who need to see the gospel of life in Christ being lived and to hear the gospel of life in Christ explained (1 Peter 2:11-12; 3:15). And offering sports opportunities to the community can provide an initial point of contact with the community. Look up, for instance, the origins of the soccer club, Tottenham Hotspur. Indeed, as has been noted elsewhere in this issue, the physical benefits of sporting endeavour, in their place, are noted in Scripture (1 Tim 4:8), and the lessons

sport teaches are used to illustrate how the Christian should live and serve the Lord (2 Tim. 2:5).

And yet, as has also been stated in this issue, the matter of idolatry must be considered in relation to sport. It is easy to see how sport, whether it be playing it, following it, watching it, or discussing it can easily become an idolatrous trap. For one thing, sport easily takes up large amounts of time. So when we subtract the time we spend sleeping and eating and working and worshipping from the limited hours of a week, every hour spent on sport soon adds up to a major

“We are going to have to search our hearts to see if we are seeking first the kingdom of heaven, and/or if we are ruled by more than one master.”





slice of the time left; time we need for other spiritual disciplines, for service, and for our families. So, also in relation to sport, we are going to have to search our hearts to see if we are seeking first the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 6:33), and/or if we are ruled by more than one master (Matt. 6:24).

But to these questions about idolatry we should add the closely intertwined question of identity. After all, competitive team sport is very much pitched towards identity. Two people talking about a forthcoming game will say, "I think we can win it this year," or "You guys don't stand a chance of beating us!" There are cities all around the world where daily life is marked by whether you live on the red side of town or the

blue side of town. And many of us will know that feeling of being personally involved in a sporting contest despite the fact that we are not playing and may only be watching/listening to it on the TV, internet, or radio. Somehow, I am affected by a win or loss.

However, when we consider what the Bible says about idolatry and identity, we find that the believer is one whose life is now hidden in Christ (Col. 3:3-4). We are those who are pilgrims or aliens whose true home is in heaven (1 Peter 1:1, 17) and who have a calling to live accordingly. Indeed, we are to be those who set their "minds on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God ... not on earthly things (Col. 3:1-2)." And so, questions like these can be

“Jesus Christ deserves our all. His Lordship needs to include the choices we make in terms of legitimate sporting activity, be it participation or spectating, and the time and attention we give to sports.”

asked as we seek to examine ourselves against these principles of Scripture: Does talking about sport affect me more than talking about the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ? Are my will and my passions stirred more by sport than by the presence of the Lord in worship? Does the need to see the game or hear a score-update regularly distract me from spiritual disciplines or fellowship opportunities? If so, then in terms of idolatry and identity, sport has become one of the devil's schemes to hinder our growth in godliness (Eph. 6:11).

And in this, sport does provide a useful point of reference with which to compare our devotion to the Lord. For instance, many of us will know people who argue that one can have joy in the Lord without it being visible on their face as they sing a song of praise only to see their face light up when they talk about the All Blacks or witness a try being scored. And then there are those of us who struggle to learn the books of the Bible but have little difficulty naming every team and player in the Super 15. Every catechism teacher laments the certain knowledge that while young Sam/Pam has apologised for not getting his/her catechism homework done because of busyness, the two volleyball/netball practices and games each week would not be missed for anything. And the same applies to preparations for Bible study – "Sorry. Didn't have time," yet had time to watch Wellington beat Canterbury and/or the Warriors beat Cronulla ...

Before we wrap up with some closing thoughts, though, the times we live in demand that we at least briefly consider a few more sports. And these fall into two main categories: First, there are those sports that our mothers universally decry as pure violence, such as boxing, UFC, MMA, etc; and second, the 'extreme sports' such as base-jumping, whitewater kayaking, and spelunking to name but a few. Now, the fact that we *enjoy* such sports does not make them legitimate pursuits for believers. And neither does the fact that this or that study has shown that more people have died while brushing their teeth in the bathroom than while engaged in sports like these sort the argument out conclusively.

In relation to the first group of sports, at the most basic level, this question should be asked and answered: How can the pummeling and injuring of my opponent in an athletic competition be glorifying to God? And while the "what

would Jesus do?" saying is overused and frequently misapplied, the question "can I really picture Jesus participating in extreme fighting?" is very relevant to the question of whether a Christian can participate in or enjoy 'extreme' fighting focused on physical violence.

In relation to the second group of sports, it is neither possible nor profitable to draw blanket conclusions to cover them all. However, consider these thought provoking words from the evangelist, Ray Comfort: "I watched a video clip of a bungee jumper recently, whose cord looped around his neck. He was more than likely already dead when his friends were calling for him to take the noose off his neck and to lift his knees. This came hard on the heels of a shallow-thinking woman who jumped off a bridge in South Africa. When the cord broke, the company lamented that they had had 150,000 jumps without incident. I would think one was about due. I hope more people watch the clips of cords snapping, and that more will check out the statistics of how many people die when

jumping from high places (base-jumping and sky-diving). It may put some sense into them. If you're a Christian and you are tempted to jump, instead of catering to your thrill-seeking ego, think of someone else other than yourself. Think of those who love you and those for whom you are responsible. This injudicious world doesn't know any better. You should. Think of the more than 150,000 people who die every 24 hours, and if you want a thrill, get up on a soapbox and tell dying sinners how to find everlasting life. That will kill your ego.¹"

Sport, then, is another area where there is need for daily self-examination in the light of what we have been saved from and what we have been saved to. Jesus Christ deserves our all. His Lordship needs to include the choices we make in terms of legitimate sporting activity, be it participation or spectating, and the time and attention we give to sports. And if we are guilty of idolatrous attachment to sport, may the Spirit of the Lord strip it from us and fill our hearts, instead, with a greater love for

"things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God."

But may He also help us to see that precisely because we do live in a sports-saturated culture we have an obvious point of difference with those who find their identity in sports. Sport is not something that we should wholly avoid as belonging to the devil. On the contrary, in addition to the gospel possibilities that we have already noted above, sport's wholesome virtues and ideals provide good launching points for gospel conversations. After all, why do we naturally dislike bad sportsmanship and have such a high regard for gracious winners? May the Lord also, then, give us courage to use involvement in sport for His glory (1 Cor. 9:19-27).

Note

1 <http://raycomfortfood.blogspot.com/2012/01/thrill-of-bungee-jump.html>

Mr Andre Holtslag is the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

Book in focus

The Christian and television

John A. Haverland

As you begin this article I want you to know that we own a TV – just one. Most of you who read this article will also have one; or maybe two, or even three! Other Christians choose not to own one. I have some sympathy for their view and could certainly live without one, but my article is not written from the perspective that you should put a sledge hammer through the screen! So, keep reading.

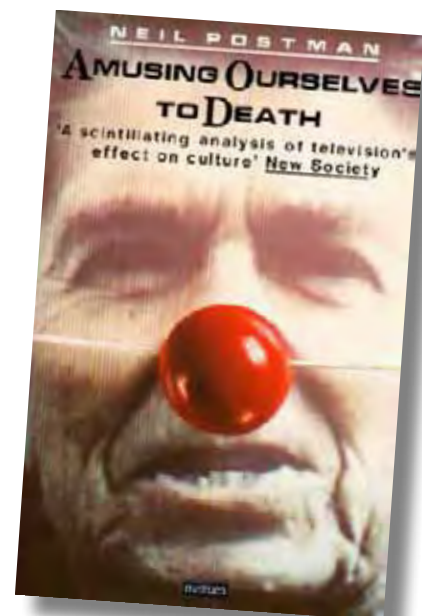
The editor asked me to write this article as a review of a fine book by Neil Postman, entitled *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. (The title of this issue has been borrowed from this book). The editor also asked me to make a few comments about the Christian and TV. Allow me to begin with the second assignment, and then go to the first; this will allow

me to get a few matters off my chest.

TV, of course, is an abbreviation for *television*. The word is made up of two parts: tele, a Greek word meaning "far" plus a Latin word *visio* meaning "sight". Pictures are transmitted to our screens from afar so that we can see them in our homes. Television is about vision, seeing, and watching; it is of visual interest. Last night my wife and I watched a BBC programme on the Arctic and the Antarctic and saw stunning images of snowcapped mountains, glaciers, icebergs, and the variety of creatures that live in those cold waters. This is television at its best.

Studies and surveys have shown that *most people watch a phenomenal amount of TV*; or, if they are not watching it, it is on in the background a lot of the time. The screen is placed in a central and visible position in the lounge,

dining or family room; or there is one in all three! When it is on it demands attention. Even if the sound is off your





eyes are drawn to it because the images are colourful and constantly changing. If a group of people are in the room and are conversing together the TV will take some of their attention; that is inevitable because the medium is compelling. As a pastor I am often visiting people in their homes. If the TV is left on it distracts me, and those I am visiting, from concentrating on the subject at hand. The programme being screened may be completely harmless, but the harm comes as our attention is drawn to it and away from spiritual and eternal matters. If you want to give your full attention to conversing with others then do everyone a favour and turn it off!

I want to make a similar observation about *having the TV on during dinner*. Husbands and fathers are the most likely because the programmers have cleverly designed the news broadcast for this time slot. Most men are just home from work and they want to see the news of the day. As a result many families in New Zealand eat their dinner in front

of the television. This, of course, rules out any meaningful conversation about the events of the day. If you attempt such conversation you will be told; "Be quiet! I can't hear what's going on!" I am surprised and disappointed to hear how many Christian families, and members of our own churches, have fallen into this bad habit. I am not saying that you may never have a TV dinner; we sometimes do so ourselves. But I would urge that the regular pattern, especially for the evening meal, ought to be that we sit at the table as a family and use the time to talk together.¹ This is the time to ask questions of each other about what happened during the day, at home, at work, at school, polytech or university. As our family was growing up the evening meal was (and still is) the highlight of the day. Members of the family entertained the rest of us with amusing renditions of their day at work and the people they had met. Others gave interesting accounts of what they had heard in their classroom or lecture theatre and conversations with other students.

“There are so many ways we can use our time productively, but spending the entire evening in front of a screen is not one of them.”

Guests eating with us told us about their lives and their experiences. All this extended our mealtimes, but for all of us these dinner times were a valuable part of family life. Having the TV on would have made that impossible.

A further concern about TV is that it can be an *incredible waste of time*. You can sit in front of that screen for an entire evening watching mindless trivia. At the end you have achieved nothing and learnt little. Again, the programmers are clever and they have thought of many tricks to draw you into the next programme. They advertise the evening viewing in advance and give you brief trailers to excite your interest. But at the end of the day you have wasted another evening. The same could be said of watching DVDs, or playing computer games, or viewing endless clips on YouTube. What about reading *Faith in Focus*, or a Christian book from your church library, or playing a game with your children, or visiting someone who is lonely, or even talking together?! There are so many ways we can use our time productively, but spending the entire evening in front of a screen is not one of them.

Even worse, television can be *detrimental to your spiritual health*. Yes, there are beautiful programmes about the world and its wildlife, there are interesting documentaries and news broadcasts that inform us about our world; but there are also programmes that are crude and rude, or coarse and vulgar, or immoral and pornographic, or violent and bloody, or satanic and evil, or a combination of all of these vices. Why would you watch such programmes? Surely, when these shows come on it is time to hit the red button on your remote!

Sometimes a programme is both entertaining and interesting but it raises matters that you and your family need to *think about*. Perhaps non-Christian values were promoted, or the characters pursued lives of sin that had no consequences, or perhaps positive values were upheld. There is much value in discussing as a family what you have seen, analysing what people did and why, and where those decisions took them. As parents we need to teach our children to think critically about what they watch and to assess it for themselves in the light of God's Word.

Neil Postman's book will help you do this critical thinking. *Amusing Ourselves to Death* was published in 1985. The author died in 2003. The book is not

“‘serious television’ is a contradiction in terms; it speaks in only one consistent voice – the voice of entertainment.”

written about the *content* of television but about the *medium*. Postman takes Marshall McLuhan’s famous statement, “The medium is the message”, and explores the ways this is true of television.

In the opening chapters he traces the ways communication has changed from being oral, to being written, and then to being visual. He argues that the oral and written word are rational and propositional and promote thinking, analysis and understanding; whereas visual images are directed to our feelings and aim to move our passions and entertain us. Postman believes that the medium of television is essentially entertaining. He does not object to our being entertained, but points out that this is all it does – it is show business. He claims that “the phrase ‘serious television’ is a contradiction in terms; that television speaks in only one consistent voice – the voice of entertainment.”² He continues, “The problem is not that television presents us with entertaining subject matter but that all subject matter is presented as entertaining No matter what is depicted or from what point of view, the overarching assumption is that it is there for our amusement and pleasure.”³ This all-pervasive medium, he believes, has had far reaching consequences in society. It has reduced our ability to think about,

consider and analyse what we see and hear and has led to a decline in “the seriousness, clarity and, above all, value of public discourse.”⁴

He writes a penetrating chapter applying his thesis to television news, arguing that the vast amount of information we are given is fragmented and divorced from its social and intellectual context. Every day we hear about wars, famines, earthquakes, floods and murders, but there is little that we can do about these problems. This vast amount of information we receive has no genuine connection to our lives; we live in “a culture overwhelmed by irrelevance, incoherence, and impotence.”⁵ Added to that, these brief summaries of human disaster and misery are juxtaposed with sports, commercials and amusing trivialities. The phrase “Now ... this” sums up the rapid transitions made from horror to humour, from what is brutal to what is banal, from news that is momentous to that which is inconsequential. Postman convincingly argues that television news is presented as entertainment. I encourage you to evaluate it from this perspective and you will see that he is right.

He applies his thesis to politics and demonstrates that American presidential elections are fought on the television image the candidate presents rather than

the policies or views he holds; presidents are elected for their showmanship and style rather than their thinking and ability. He also applies his thesis to religious television shows and argues that they too are presented as entertainment; they are more about the preacher than about God, more about money and ratings than about genuine worship. And he applies his thesis to the use of television in education, quoting studies that students learn more from oral and written leaning than they do from the television medium.

Postman’s review of the oral and written medium in the history of America is fascinating; the book is worth purchasing for these chapters alone! His critique of television is thoughtful and insightful. His writing style is both clever and clear, as we would expect from the former chairman of Communication Arts at New York University.

As Christians we need to think critically and biblically about both the medium and the content television. Postman’s book helps us do this. I commend it to you for your careful reading.

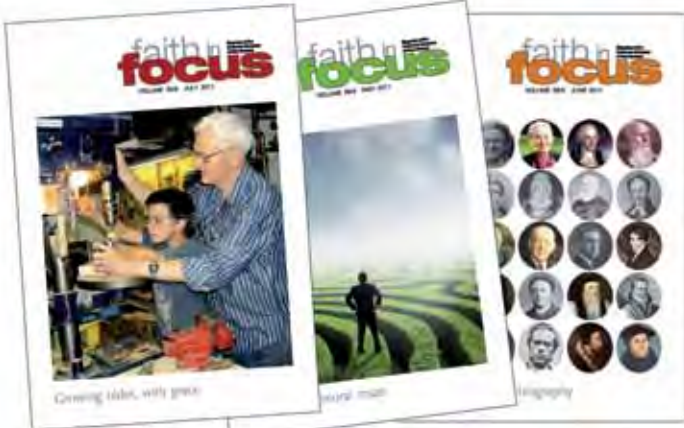
Notes

- 1 If you must watch the news then purchase the freeview decoder and watch channel 3 news on 3+1 at 7pm! Or better still, listen to the news on the radio, which is less entertaining and therefore more informative. (see Postman’s comments on television news later in this article)
- 2 *Ibid.* p. 80
- 3 *Ibid.* p. 87
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 29
- 5 *Ibid.* p. 76

Mr John Haverland is the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Pukekohe.

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Feminine focus

Sally Davey

So ... you have some spare time?

Life does not generally come in neatly-packaged compartments, clearly labelled and ready to take up at appropriate moments. We usually have to think about what we're going to do, and make careful choices about what, at any given time, would be our best assignment. Such choices are often easier when you are employed by someone else – they generally decide for you. It's that much

more difficult when you work at home. Usually one manages one's own time and the myriad of small tasks needing to be done can sound rather pitiful as an occupation when compared with "being at work". Besides, given our obsession with money-making, paid employment *sounds* more useful! Leisure, or discretionary time, for a working-outside-the-home woman sounds like a well-earned

break. Leisure activities for the woman at home sound like a waste of time.

The woman's dilemma

In reality, though, all of us, in paid employment or not, need to consider the ways we spend our time. It is not our own to kill. We shall have to answer to God himself, one day, as to what we've done with it. It could well be that "working" women have more problem with wasting their time than those of us who work at home for no financial gain. The point is that child-rearing, cooking, washing, cleaning, child-chauffeuring, errand-running, gardening, grocery shopping, voluntary church labour and general hospitality are often more than a full-time job. Then again, what by others might be called our hobbies may actually be useful, home-enhancing (and money-saving) projects. For this reason, I find it hard to call my dressmaking merely a hobby, since I know I can make shirts for \$30 that might cost \$150 to buy. The woman at home is often hard-pressed to draw a line between what is a recreational pursuit and what is work. Because I enjoy sewing, does that make it simply a leisure pursuit? Of course not.

As the other writers in this month's issue have rightly pointed out, we all have to ask ourselves whether what we are doing in our discretionary time is being used to the glory of God. Perhaps these days it is a particularly pressing question because many have so much of it. It may be a real problem to us. It amazes me, for instance, that anyone in a responsible, paid position in the workforce can be spared from their work for four full weeks of the year (no wonder New Zealand is considered a low-productivity economy). We have so many holidays that leisure time stacks up and becomes a burden to us. Now, I know that's not true for everyone ... I know all too well that owning your own business means it can be almost impossible to take more than one holiday every few years. I can hear your hollow laughter ... But if you do have four weeks paid annual



leave, **plus** all the statutories to fill up, you really do need to be thinking how you can use all this time to the glory of God. It seems to me that weeks of fun in the sun, many hours of TV-viewing and days spent engrossed in pulp fiction are simply not a good enough answer. At the very least (and probably at the top of the list) should be time spent getting to know unbelieving neighbours, helping needy fellow church members, and some very serious, focused study of God's Word.

In the end all of us, wherever we work, have choices to make about using the time we don't need to spend working. The other writers in this issue have pointed out some of the bad choices we can make in using this time – bad choices as to the activities themselves. I know that women – even Christian women – make bad choices of this kind. But it's not my intention to point the finger at anyone by listing specific bad activities here. (I battle over such choices in subtle and not-so-subtle ways often enough myself; and many of you know only too well what your own personal weaknesses are, anyway). No, what I want to do here is suggest ways we might *better* use the reasonably good spare-time activities we engage in, to the greater glorifying of God.

A plea

I have a specific purpose in mind. And that is evangelism. It distresses me how little time many of us seem to spend with unbelievers. It seems that most of us go through our lives with little, if indeed any, deep personal engagement with unbelieving women – flesh-and blood, real people – to the extent that we know them and love them. Many of you have a workmate who occupies a desk a meter or two from your own, with whom you speak daily, and whose face you know well. But would you ever think of asking her home for dinner? Of taking her out for lunch? Would you even regard her as a friend; someone you would drop everything for if her husband left her, or if she were involved in a serious car accident? Have you ever spoken about Christ with her? Is all she knows about your faith the fact that you attend church on Sundays? It is a shocking thought that she might spend an eternity in hell – and you never did anything to warn her. What about the unbelieving neighbours we all have? Most of us know little or nothing about their personal lives – their hopes, dreams, fears and general motiva-

tions in life. Most of us have said little or nothing to them about why we love Christ. How much do we care?

Perhaps that is because we live life in cosy, watertight compartments. We have our friends and family in the safe confines of the church community – we think it's more virtuous; and we find it safer, more comfortable and much easier to give all our social and personal energy to the church community. We tend to speak the same language, share the same assumptions about life – and church people "fit" with the ease of an old glove. We find ourselves not only worshipping with other church members, but also eating with them, living with them, working and doing business with them; shopping, playing, and engaging in all manner of leisure pursuits with them. Some of us even spend all our holidays with them!

core sinners. Such as – for example – drug addicts or prostitutes. This is scary stuff, meaning that we're afraid of venturing out unless we're in a big group. But big group efforts often mean less personal involvement, and we seldom get to know needy sinners in any ongoing, personal way. In any way that results in individually changed lives. What I think we need to do instead is to think of sinners as ordinary people like you and me – just like that lady whose desk at work is one meter from yours. Her heart is much more likely to be engaged and her life changed if you think in terms of including her in some of your good, enjoyable out-of-work pursuits. Remember, unbelievers may be ordinary law-abiding people who enjoy classical music, and have better-behaved children than you do!

Let me illustrate this by suggesting a



<http://en.wikipedia.org> – Teunie, nl

This, it seems to me, is not at all right. (Actually, I would go so far as to say I think it's quite wrong). Just as Israel in the Old Testament was supposed to be a light for the Gentiles around them¹ – and failed by becoming a self-righteous, exclusive (yet inwardly sinful) people; so we can fail our unbelieving neighbours by smugly enjoying our church community and ignoring those who need us. As Jesus said, if salt loses its saltiness, what is it good for but to be thrown away?²

Many of us tend to think that evangelism means joining a major organised group effort and making a (superficial) foray into the dangerous world of hard-

few scenarios. Perhaps you enjoy a bit of shopping. (And the occasional coffee and chat with a friend or your sister). Nothing wrong with that, providing it doesn't blow the budget, feed covetousness or take time from other more important things. But have you ever thought of it as a useful way of getting to know an unbelieving workmate or neighbour better? Perhaps your workmate has expressed some uncertainty about an outfit for a wedding. Why not ask her out for lunch and offer yourself as an unofficial wardrobe advisor? A sounding board? This could lead to good conversation about clothes, appearance, weddings –

and a woman's image in the light of the Christian gospel. It could simply lead to deeper confidences and some sharing of personal struggles in life. In short, you could become a trusted friend who may be called on in time of personal crisis – for Christ's sake. It is not dangerous to have an unbelieving friend – I would go so far as to say it is Christ's command!

Perhaps you enjoy tennis. Normally you would think of grabbing a game with a good friend from church with similar ability. She's someone you've known forever – you grew up together, went to school and catechism class together, and your children are similar ages. Tennis is a great way to relax and whack out your frustrations. And the coffee together afterwards tastes great! But have you ever thought that you're simply perpetuating your closed-circle network of relationships by doing this? Have you ever thought of joining a regular neighbourhood tennis club, peopled by unbeliev-

ers, for the express purpose of getting to know some of them in order to share the gospel with them? Tennis is just the handy connecting-point that you have in common – a good, healthy recreational activity that puts you on a common level and allows your lives to meet. Use it, and develop the occasion by talking and sharing your life and your faith!

Perhaps you love cooking. Normally your skills are utilised in family meals, church lunches and occasional meals-on-wheels for those in the church who've been sick or had a baby or whatever. But you've sometimes thought about going to a cooking class to learn a new technique. Why not? What a great way to get to know someone new! Perhaps to find someone outside your circle – an unbeliever – and to build a friendship on a shared interest? Talking about food often opens doors into someone else's family life, and heart. Maybe you have a young person living in your home – for

instance, an international student. This young person (almost without fail) is interested in food, and nine times out of ten wants to learn how to cook. Then spend time in the kitchen and show her (or him!). It will be the perfect setting for good conversation about all sorts of things. And if you are discerning, your conversation will lead in the end to the big questions of life and the heart of the gospel.

The point I really want to make in all this is that evangelism takes place in the small things of life. Sharing Christ does not necessitate big programmes or group efforts. All it takes is the creative and generous use of your spare time. Share your hobbies, share your sport – and share, above all, *yourself!*

Notes

- 1 Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; 60:1-3
- 2 Matthew 5:13

Thriving under God's discipline

Trading temporary pain for eternal gain

William Boekestein

None of us need to be told that our lives are sometimes painful. We struggle with feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. We experience the frustration of physical pain and failure. We know what it's like to be let down, looked down upon, misunderstood and mistreated.

Our hurt is real. But the amazing reality is that if we suffer while trusting in Jesus then our story is similar to those listed in Hebrews 11. In fact, the letter to the Hebrews was written for believers who were tempted to give up due to their struggles. They (like us today) desperately needed to know that God disciplines those he loves for their good and his glory (Heb. 12:3-11). The first half of Hebrews 12 is an invitation to trade temporary pain for eternal gain.

To grow through life's pain we must know three things: What God's discipline is, how to respond to it and what it produces.

Definition of discipline

God's discipline of his children is his comprehensive training plan for our maturity. He works all things for the good of those whom he has called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28). God has promised to sanctify his people; to not leave them in their natural immaturity. He carries out this promise by disciplining us.

A positive plan

The Bible stresses that although God's discipline is painful, the plan is positive. When we hear "discipline" we often think of fear, anger and punishment. The word for discipline in Hebrews 12 means "to train a child." True training is not limited to rebuke and chastisement but includes encouragement, teaching and gentle correction. God disciplines us by teaching us how to stay on the path of godliness (formative discipline) as well as by lovingly correcting us when we stray from that path (corrective discipline). God's discipline is varied but it is always good.

A pressing plan

God's discipline is also a pressing plan; we need him to train us. People hire personal trainers to get in shape because they know, on their own, they lack the expertise and will-power to make it happen. So it is with us and God. We lack the wisdom and motivation to discipline ourselves. If it wasn't for God's persevering discipline we would not only become lazy in our quest for godliness, we would quit the effort altogether. As much as we don't always want God's discipline, we need it.

A perfect plan

Finally, God's discipline is a perfect plan. Hebrews 12 contrasts God's discipline with that of human parents. God's discipline excels that of human parents in all areas including severity, consistency, attitude, motive and duration. Parents sometimes discipline too hard, sometimes too soft; God knows just how hard to press. Parents sometimes fail to

act due to laziness, discouragement or naivety; God never misses an opportunity to mature us. Parents sometimes discipline in anger; God always chastens in love. Parents sometimes discipline out of embarrassment; God's discipline always flows from his righteous commitment to our good. Finally, parents discipline for a short time to prepare us for adulthood; God trains us our whole lives in preparation for eternity.

Whatever our preconceptions of chastening may be, the Bible insists that God's discipline of his children is his positive, perfect and pressing training plan for our maturity.

Details of discipline

All discipline is positive and believers regularly experience discipline that even feels positive. Christians rejoice as God informs and transforms their mind through regular Bible teaching. We are grateful when he helps us to defeat previously besetting sins. We are thankful that as God grants us faithfulness in small things he gives us opportunities with greater things.

But, while all discipline is positive, not all discipline feels positive but painful. One of the lessons in Hebrews 12 is that we should not be surprised by pain; it's essential to training.

Painful experiences

Sometimes God disciplines us through painful experiences. We face opposition from friend and foe; from the righteous and the wicked. God is teaching us that he alone is faithful. We bump up against limitations whether regular inabilities, unique physical or emotional disabilities or frustrated plans. God is teaching us that our strength is perfected in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). God's children sometimes enter into times of painful backsliding. God allows us to know the pain of unbelief to increase our love for grace. Through no fault of our own the Lord sometimes clouds his face from us so we cry out for his presence. And we have all experienced what can only be described as personal tragedies. When our world turns upside down we eventually more clearly see the constancy of God.

Painful emotions or attitudes

Loneliness and sadness are opportunities for us to cry out to God (Psa. 73:25,26; 86:3) and ask questions. Fear can be used to treat our self-confidence. Extreme boredom may be God's way

of exposing our puny vision for life. Painful conviction of sin urges repentance (Psa. 32:4). Conversely, callousness to sin teaches us the attitude that lands people in hell.

The point is, as Absalom finally got Joab's attention by setting fire to his grain field (2 Sam. 14:28-31), God often reaches us through pain.

Demands of discipline

John Calvin advises us that we only experience God's discipline as paternal when we respond to it as sons. How do we respond to God's discipline as sons and daughters?

Trusting submission (Heb. 12:9).

Such a response of love requires trust. Do we really believe that God makes no mistakes? Theologically we would say "yes." Experientially we might wonder. But faith trusts that not a hair can fall from our heads apart from the will of God. Faith is convinced that each pain God sends our way has written on it, "For your good."

Through trusting submission we resist grumbling against providence. We resist angry and vengeful responses toward others. We resist living according to the feelings that painful experiences can evoke, fixing our eyes instead, on God's goal.

Loving gratitude

There is nothing like hearing your son say, "I love you" after you have disciplined him. Such a response is essential to growing through discipline. It reveals that we have learned to say with Job: "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).

Prayerful reflection

But submitting to discipline is not stoicism. When we feel the unpleasant pressures of God's providence we need to ask, "What might God be teaching me? Likewise we should ask God, "Why is this happening?" Similar questions are asked by God's children over twenty times in the Psalms.

Destination of discipline

In a word, discipline produces maturity. Through discipline God gets our attention and breaks us out of our sense of self-sufficiency. God sends us challenges to strengthen our faith. With maturity comes a greater awareness about ourselves, our sin and our Savior.

Greater assurance of God's love

God's discipline convinces us that "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him" (Prov. 13:24; cf. 22:15; 23:13ff.) and "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Rev. 3:19). God loves his children too much to give them a life that is suitable to their flesh and to allow them to destroy their lives pursuing ungodliness. When you suffer as a Christian you can have this assurance ringing in your ears, "God is treating me as a son!"

Closer communion with Christ

As we are disciplined we think of Christ, something we might rarely do if things always went well. When we experience trials it becomes perfectly natural to meditate on the faithfulness and compassion of Jesus (Heb. 12:3).

Deeper experience of joy

Young children are happy when things go well and sad when they go ill; that's superficial joy. Through discipline we are trained to experience deep joy even in pain (James 1:2).

Stronger resolve for holiness

Hebrews 12:10 says that believers are disciplined "that we might share in his holiness." Through God's discipline Christians "strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees" (Heb. 12:12) and press on in holiness.

Deeper yearning for heaven

If we were not disciplined we would be content with our present circumstances. Tragically we would then miss the wonder of anticipating heaven.

God disciplines us as sons to make us more like his Son to prepare us to live in his family forever. This grand reality doesn't take away the pain of life but it does encourage us with the knowledge that pain is a servant to God's perfect purpose.

Mr William Boekestein is the pastor of Covenant Reformed Church in Carbondale, PA (URCNA).

The glorious New Zealand experiment

Part 2

Shared Ministers

This is the second excerpt from an essay by Mr Jack Sawyer which appeared in the book *Confident of Better Things: Essays Commemorating Seventy-five Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*.

Jack Sawyer

"Hello Tom," the letter from John Galbraith read, "I have a question for you, so you may want to take a seat. How would you like to go to New Zealand?" Tom and Jean Tyson were about to begin one of the great adventures of their lives, travelling to and from New Zealand by lengthy ocean voyages, through the Panama Canal, and across the broad expanse of the mighty Pacific Ocean. Tom would go on to serve as Pastor of the Reformed Church of Buckland's Beach, and then subsequently the Reformed Church of Hamilton. But Tom was not the first OPC minister to serve in New Zealand; he was preceded by Raymond O. Zorn and G.I. Williamson.¹

By the late 1950s, the OPC and the RCNZ had concluded their ecclesiastical courtship and entered into official sister-church relations. Bill Deenick wrote to the Twenty-Eighth General Assembly in behalf of the RCNZ the following:

We would like to express how thankful we are and how much we praise the Lord for the Orthodox Presbyterian witness. In New Zealand we had to face a situation in the established Presbyterian Church which was very similar to the circumstances in the States twenty-five years ago and we believed that we had to follow the

example you gave us. We bless the Lord that He has enabled you to continue steadfastly in your witness for the gospel of salvation by grace and by faith alone, and we feel that we should assure you that not just in the States, but in many parts of the world we of the Reformed, the Presbyterian faith do listen to the voice of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and of the Westminster Seminary. We have hoped for many years that we would be able to find help in the ranks of your Church for the ministerial and pastoral needs of New Zealand, and we are thankful that it seems as if God is opening doors for us in this regard.²

The persistent plea for ministers willing to come over and help in New Zealand was one keenly felt at that time. From the beginning, the RCNZ churches were determined to be real New Zealand churches, not merely isolated Dutch transplant congregations, meaning that facility with the English language was vital. With this rationale in mind, they issued calls to men from both the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and the OPC. First, from the CRC background came men such as Richard Venema, then of Sioux Center, Iowa, and later Sidney Cooper, who had studied at Westminster Seminary.³

² This would be a reference to the Rev. Raymond O. Zorn, graduate of Westminster Seminary and ordained in the Presbytery of New Jersey, who would serve as minister of the Reformed Church of Hamilton, and stated clerk of the RCNZ. Ray Zorn would go on to serve as Professor of Systematic Theology and Principal of the Reformed Theological College in Geelong, Australia. In this key position, he would become a formative influence on a generation of reformed ministers in Australia and New Zealand.

³ Venema, later to serve faithfully in the OPC, was described thus by congregants hungry to hear God's word, "to the great joy, happiness, and gratitude of Dunedin and all the churches, this brother coming from Sioux Center, Iowa accepted the call. He arrived with his family on the thirteenth of September in Auckland, made a strenuous trip through islands, preaching and speaking, wherever he went in the

According to Williamson and Tyson, Galbraith, then General Secretary for the OPC Committee on Foreign Missions, was an active recruiter in this process when it came to securing OPC men for service in New Zealand. Williamson being a friend of Zorn, approached Galbraith about any possible opportunities there might be for him. Shortly thereafter, a call issued forth from Auckland where the Reformed Church of that city was contemplating division into two congregations, and where G.I. would find himself in the new Mangere congregation. Not long after Tom Tyson was on the scene as well.⁴

The Orthodox Presbyterian ministers were warmly welcomed by their young Dutch parishioners and struck by their sense of loyalty, both to their minister and to their church.⁵ Because of the immigration policy previously mentioned, weddings and baptisms were far more frequent than funerals. The integrity and earnestness of the people were obvious, especially that of the young ruling elders,⁶

different Reformed churches." He served in Dunedin and later Bucklands Beach (which his son, Prof. Cornel Venema, remembers with particular fondness) before returning to the States.

⁴ Also serving during this period were Carl J. Reitsma in Wellington, and V. Robert Nilson in Hastings. In 1963 Zorn, already stated clerk of the RCNZ, wrote to the GA of that year, "this month we were blessed by the coming of G.I. Williamson to us from you. So we rejoice in these mutual ties which so closely bind our two communions together." Tom Tyson arrived in March of 1964. Again Zorn wrote, "how happy we are for the coming of another minister." The same letter expressed eager anticipation for Mr. Galbraith himself to arrive to promote joint foreign mission work in Formosa.

⁵ The Dutch call this 'kerkbesef'. "This term implies that the members are deeply conscious of what the church is all about, of why they are committed to being active and loyal members of the church to which they belong, because the Lord himself has called you and stationed you in your congregation or denomination." Vanderpyl, 467ff. This concept is sadly often conspicuous by its absence in American churches.

⁶ The Session of the Reformed Church of Wellington, humorously but accurately, were known to set the order of the day for their meetings by the "crowing of the cock." Two young elders from

¹ The ocean voyages were arduous. Tyson, Tom not Jean, describes one terrific storm as "fun." Williamson, too, remembers a violent storm near Hawaii, where he "feared the ship would founder." Later OPC transplants would travel by air. Thomas E. Tyson and G.I. Williamson, Interviews with the author, 2010.

who were so honored to be elders, and very conscientious in fulfilling their pastoral responsibilities in home visitation, hospitality, reading sermons, and overseeing the life and doctrine of the minister.⁷

They also learned about the Three Forms of Unity, catechism preaching, and relished the emphasis given to catechising of the covenant youth of each congregation. Since 1953, the RCNZ had been discussing adoption of the Westminster Confession. After years of reflection and study about the divergences (e.g. the covenant of works, the invisible church, and the Sabbath) between the two confessional traditions, they finally embraced the Westminster Confession in 1965.⁸ This in turn precipitated a discussion of how one subscribed to the Confession and resulted in helpful guidelines to the original Dutch form of subscription.⁹ Sympathetic throughout this process, the Americans attempted to help serve these ends without trying to impose their convictions on others. It is interesting to note that Prof. Ned Stonehouse of Westminster Seminary was consulted on several occasions during this process and is quoted at various places in committee reports.¹⁰

the suburb of Wainuiomata, Jos Verbokkem and Jeen DeVries, vividly remember sharing a little second hand motorbike and returning in the freezing cold from Wellington City “over the Wainui hill” at 2:00 in the morning. Such was their inexperience, and zeal. Jos Verbokkem, interview with the author, 2008.

7 One must understand that these were young men, often only in their twenties), few of whom had attended university or even finished high school as we know it in America. The OPC men who served in the RCNZ are in enthusiastic agreement that Presbyterian ruling elders could learn a tremendous amount from the model provided in the RCNZ and other like churches such as the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA).

8 Vanderpyl, 452ff. Williamson perceptively commented, as chairman of the Synod that year, “Whether we have been aware of it or not, this has really been an historic Synod. For the first time in the history of Reformed Christianity, as far as I know, the full text of the Westminster Confession of Faith has been adopted by a denomination also holding the three continental forms of unity.”

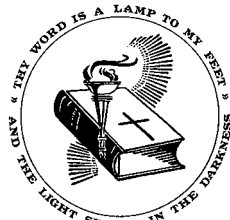
9 Vanderpyl, 471.

10 See RCNZ Acts of Synod, 1957, Report A, where an extract of a letter from Stonehouse is reproduced. This entire exercise is understood against the backdrop of the Rev. Alex Scarrow, pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Howick. Mr. Scarrow was a lone courageous soul, who for the sake of the Gospel, was willing, to separate with his congregation from Presbyterian apostasy, and endure the stigma of associating with these new “Dutch Reformed Churches.” This was not a popular move as noted in the

In the early-to-mid-1960s, the RCNZ were also wrestling with differences between what was Reformed or Presbyterian in terms of church order, liturgy, and discipline. So OPC men were learning on the job about Consistory/Session; Presbytery/Classis; Denomination/Federation; Confessional membership/or credible profession of faith; exclusive or preponderant psalms; grape juice or

unwilling to lose such a prize, dove in and tossed the fish into the boat.” Later on, in Hamilton, a farming center and numerous parishioners being farmers, he was also periodically recruited to help bale hay (on one occasion 1,200 bales were counted), a hot task usually followed by cold beer.¹²

New Zealand also has the highest number of golf courses in the world



wine; holy days or Sunday only; closed or close communion; the nature of catechism preaching or expository, redemptive historical preaching, and much more. The result has been, as in the RCNZ’s Four Forms of Unity, a somewhat hybrid Reformed Federation, with Presbyterian nuances. This proved to be for all involved a memorable, yes historic, exercise in overcoming provincialism, deeply searching for common ground in spite of what may have been previously thought to be non-negotiable distinctives. Orthodox Presbyterians learned they could not only work in the Continental ecclesiastical framework, but could contribute to it, and thrive within it.¹¹

Not only did Tyson and Williamson thrive in their church settings, they also loved the beauty of New Zealand, literally at their front door. The country is breathtaking in its natural splendor, and anyone who loves the outdoors can never be bored for long. Tyson was keen to ski in the mountains with the youth group and to fish (and tell fish stories) with the men of the church. Tyson does relate this *true* story: “it was a 12-pound snapper hooked on his line in the middle of the Hauraki Gulf. Brought to the surface, the creature came off the line and, perhaps suffering from the bends, lay motionless on the water. Immediately, the somewhat daredevil angler.

per capita. Drive through almost any town and one will see a course, sometimes with sheep grazing in the rough. Williamson at Mangere and Tyson, by now at Bucklands Beach, met regularly on their day off for eighteen holes on the nearest public course. The Duke of Wellington is reputed to have said, “the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton.” Of perhaps not quite equal significance was the genesis of the illustrations for G.I. Williamson’s commentary on the Shorter Catechism on the golf courses of Auckland City. As they teed off at Chamberlain Park, being earnest Reformed pastors, they talked shop, and discussed the desirability of illustrating the manuals. They agreed that Tyson should undertake the drawing and so was born Shorty, the stick figure hero of catechism fame. Generations of students have come to love him. So endeared were G.I. and his wife Doris, that when Presbyterian and Reformed Publishers years later were seeking to reprint both volumes with more “up to date” illustrations, Doris insisted it would be unfair to Tom. G.I. agreed, the volumes live on, and so does Shorty!¹³

religious and secular press. But Scarrow “let goods and kindred go,” and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach would become a part of the RCNZ.

11 Vanderpyl, 465. One hopes this inspires some hope in North America, where the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches struggle to reach out to each other across deeply held historical/theological distinctives of doctrine, polity, liturgy, and discipline.

12 Thomas E. Tyson, interview with the author, 2010. This leads to a serious point. The question of the Dutch customs concerning alcohol and tobacco were a matter of dispute to the Kiwi Presbyterian entrants to the RCNZ who felt that such “harmful behavior of the Dutch brethren, by their smoking and drinking, was holding up the mission of the Reformed faith in this country.” Pastor Tom drank cold water that day. This reminds us of another OPC minister baling hay one very hot Summer day in Indiana. Cornelius Van Til said with a twinkle in his eye, “I took the cold beer.”

13 Williamson’s commentary on the Catechism was produced week by week on a manual type writer and a hand cranked Gestetner copier as he prepared his lessons for the boys and

One last anecdote, a lighthearted OPC contribution to the RCNZ, must be recounted. The event is still cherished among the senior alumnae of the National Family Camp which has been held for generations every year at Finley Park, near Cambridge, NZ. Tyson's skill with the piano has been known to many in the OPC for years. Less well known, perhaps, is Williamson's talent on the saxophone. G.I. was actually a gifted member of several jazz bands before his conversion focused his mind on theology. The talent show at camp one year demanded display of their combined skills. This of course being the age of the 1960s and the British Invasion of John,

girls at the Reformed Church of Mangere. G.I. used meter to help the kids recite. Some of his students remember G.I. almost being "like a metronome." In similar fashion Williamson had earlier produced his commentary on the Westminster Confession while teaching his class at the OPC congregation in Fall River, MA. If one looks closely at the author's preface to the first edition it is dated in Auckland, New Zealand, July 1964.

Paul, George, and Ringo, Williamson and Tyson recruited a colleague, Fred Channing, to accompany them on the washboard, and they made their debut as *The Reformed Beatles*. While their concert was an hilarious and entertaining skit that evoked both cat calls and delighted applause, there was no hysterical screaming by the audience, nor sadly, has there been a call for an encore.

Tyson and Williamson were in demand more as speakers than musicians. One cherished National Youth Camp photograph, in the archives of the historian of the RCNZ, depicts Williamson surrounded by several hundred young people, almost all of whom continue faithful to the Lord forty years later. Likewise from his second pastorate a photo is extant of G.I. and Doris, on their final night before returning to the States in 1983, surrounded by fifty youth of the Silverstream Congregation. Williamson's successor had the blessed privilege of conducting twenty two weddings and numerous baptisms in the years following, the fruit of the Shorter Catechism

and Pastor Williamson's metered "virtual metronome." method of teaching.¹⁴

¹⁴ Jack W. Sawyer followed Williamson as pastor. His is an unusual case. As a student at Reformed Seminary in Jackson, he met Williamson while the latter was home on furlough in 1977. Several New Zealand Students were in Jackson at the time, and together with G.I., encouraged Jack and others to consider service down under. Later while in Philadelphia at Westminster Seminary, he travelled to New Zealand for a visit and stayed in the Williamson home in the Silverstream manse, little dreaming that four years later it would be his own home. Sawyer was licensed in October 1983 by the Presbytery of Philadelphia. In December of 1983 he received a call from the Reformed Church of Silverstream, where after a long process of seeking a visa, he arrived in August 1984 and was ordained in October. He received a call from Westchester OPC in 1994 and was received into the Presbytery of New York and New England, meeting at Harvey Cedars, New Jersey. This, in effect, makes Sawyer one of two RCNZ ministers to serve in the OPC, the other being Kenneth J. Campbell, longtime OPC pastor at Fairlawn, New Jersey, and active participant in the Presbytery of New Jersey, and over 25 consecutive General Assemblies of the OPC.

The Reception Question

By Peter H. Holtvlüwer

How much thought goes into our wedding receptions? I've been pondering that question for a number of years and now again as "wedding season" approaches. As a minister, I've had the honour of officiating at many weddings and most of the time being invited to the reception as well (but never to the Stag & Doe - I wonder why that is?). It's obvious that a great deal of thought goes into the ceremony: many months in advance the location is booked, the minister is asked, the best man and maid of honour are selected, musicians are approached, a text is chosen, dresses are picked out, and tuxedos are tried on. That one hour in the church is carefully choreographed to achieve the goal of a God-centred marriage of two of his children on their special day. But does the celebration which follows have the same goal? Do you leave the wedding reception with the same focus on the Lord's

good gift of marriage and the wonder of his love in giving it as you had when leaving the service?

Good humour?

There is an understandable change of mood from the ceremony to the reception. The nervousness has died down for the wedding party (and parents!). The solemnity of that occasion is behind and now it is time to relax and have fun. This is a good thing and fits with our calling to enjoy the good gifts God gives us (see the book of Ecclesiastes, e.g. 11:7-10), but do we give thought to whether our fun and humour honour our Maker?

It's the *Herman* comics that first strike me, a staple in the programs at many of our receptions. Jim Unger knows how to make people laugh with his one-square snap-shots of life's humorous moments. They often reflect something of reality and we can laugh at ourselves in them, also a good thing. But when

he sketches a marriage scene (the kind regularly chosen for the programs) then more often than not we find ourselves laughing at the very concept of marriage itself. His marriage spots consistently reflect a dysfunctional secular marriage and most certainly not a Christian marriage. Husbands and wives are pictured at odds, with one wanting to be apart from the other. The husband is often a blundering loafer trying to escape the marriage and the wife often an unhappy, complaining hag. Many segments make reference to multiple divorces and re-marriages.

Do we really want to send the message that marriage is the pits? It's hard for the comic reader not to be left feeling rather jaded about marriage and come to think of it as a very *laughable* institution. The contrast is stark: earlier in church we were taught to think of marriage as God's *blessing* but in our dinner programs we learn to think about it as a *curse*. This simply doesn't jibe.



Marriage jokes

The unchristian humour is not only found in some program comics but also in what is presented live by some emcees and/or guests. It seems a regular feature for people to tell jokes which make fun of the God-given roles of wives or husbands or simply of marriage itself. Here are a couple of examples: *"It is said that husband is the head of the family – but remember that the wife is the neck!"* Or: *"Wife: why have you been reading our marriage certificate for an hour? Husband: I was just looking for the expiry date!"*

When I hear punch lines like these I can't help but think of the many struggling marriages (also within the church!) in which such sentiments are no joke. A number of our Christian marriages are under strain precisely because husband and wife either do not understand their God-given roles or refuse to obey the Lord's calling in this respect. Such jokes are no help to them and may even hurt them deeply.

I'm certain that no one intends this result, but the reality is that such jokes put down and demean the biblical

roles of wife as submissive helper and husband as godly head and Christ-like leader. That kind of humour implies that those striving to be Christian husbands and wives are weird and abnormal, and no one wants to be considered weird. It unwittingly encourages us to follow the approach of the world. We know the world is attacking marriage. Our

Toast & roast

One good development that I've noticed is the decrease of toast speeches which humiliate either the bride or groom. It used to be quite expected that the bridal couple would get verbally "roasted" by those conducting the toasts. There is a fine line between gently ribbing someone on account of their quirks, foibles, or

“How much thought goes into our wedding receptions?”

own country is a leader in promoting gay marriage. Feminism and secularism have combined to make submission and headship dirty words. Unbelievers scoff at the notion of the wife "obeying" her husband as 1 Peter 3:6 teaches. Let's not follow their pattern or give it credibility with our jokes. Rather, let's use clean and intelligent humour which serves to retain and even promote the honour of God's good gift of marriage.

peculiar habits and on the other hand exposing them to great shame and embarrassment with sordid tales of the past. The former is good humour; the latter is poor judgment. The one maintains a love and respect for the neighbour while the other hurts and is nasty. Also in our making fun (and let's include the games and skits which are often part of our entertainment) we need to remember the Lord's commandment to love

our neighbour as ourselves and to do to them what we would have others do to ourselves. Ask yourself: how would I feel if this was being said of me (or done to me) at my wedding?

To the couple!

Another question worth asking when we write a toast to the bride or groom is: do we design it with God in mind? Of course, the purpose of the speech is to honour the bride or groom, usually a close friend of the toast-maker, and this has its place. Many times the speech focuses on funny things about the bride's past, or about how good a friend the groom has been and how important this person has been in the toast-maker's life. Because of the close bond between the friends, it can even be quite emotional, especially for the ladies. But most-often God is not men-

The Lord's children

One of the noticeable changes in our wedding celebrations over the last fifteen years is the increased use of pictures and videos. Our digital age has made these things rather inexpensive and the technology is becoming quite sophisticated. At the reception, it is quite common to have a seven to ten minute video of both the bride and groom in their growing-up years. This is often cute and touching but I think we can do much more with this. I would like to challenge our budding video artists and power-point experts to consciously bring the Lord "into the picture."

What I mean is this: the bride and groom are not just two human beings in a sea of humanity - they are two of God's own children! For those baptized as infants, all their life they have been the object God's covenant love and

“Let's use clean and intelligent humour which serves to retain and even promote the honour of God's good gift of marriage.”

tioned until the very end, with a brief, "And I wish you the Lord's blessing in your married life." Such a wish is good but could we not do more with the speech to honour the Lord?

That friend is someone we love and who loves us. That friend is important to us and has been a help to us (and hopefully we to him or her) and who put this friend in our life? The Lord! Who made this friend the special person he or she is? Who arranged the circumstances of our life in such a way that we could meet and become friends with this individual? It would be good to publicly thank God for his gift and providential leading. This friend has meant so much to us and we want to share that with the guests to show respect - great! Let us do it in the style of the Holy Spirit who regularly highlights the good works of men all the while thanking God for what these brothers and sisters have done (see Philippians 1 or 1 Thessalonians 1). Commend the friend, credit the Lord.

providential care. The Lord has been busy providing for their needs - giving them Christian parents and friends and allowing them (in many cases) a Christian education. It is by the Lord's guiding and gifting that the bride and groom are who they are. Could the video not be set within that framework? Instead of just a presentation of loosely connected scenes in a person's life where the focus is entirely on the person, the story could be told of how the Lord through the years shaped and molded his son and daughter to be the special people they are today. In this too the spot-light would still shine on the bridal couple but in such a way that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are praised for all the good that is found in them.

Sparkling wine

There is one last point which should give us the most pause for reflection, for it is often the most jarring when compared to the piety of the ceremony. Do we at our marriage feasts handle the gift

of alcohol in a God-fearing way? Many wedding receptions feature a bar - an open bar, a cash bar, a ticketed bar, or some combination thereof. Sometimes it is used to raise money for the bridal couple. And it is always well-used. In fact, the problem is that it is too well-used by some of the guests! The pull toward it is strong, the line-ups are long, and the effects are obvious - manufactured giddiness, embarrassing silliness, and outright obnoxiousness as people move from tipsy to drunk. And then sometimes only twelve hours later (or less!) we sit piously together Sunday morning in church and even join each other at times around the Lord's Table too as if nothing happened. This, too, does not jibe with being a child of God.

Think of what it does to the reputation of God when his people party like the world. In fact, many times there are non-Christians or non-church members in attendance at our receptions - what must they think of us Christians? Of the church? Of Jesus Christ? The Lord does not condemn the drinking of wine or beer or other forms of alcohol but he does condemn drunkenness (Eph 5:18). Can we not think of ways to have fun - genuine amusement - that does not abuse alcohol and offend the Lord? Perhaps thought can be given to limiting alcohol to table wine or reducing the availability of alcoholic beverages or even going altogether without it. The Lord allows its moderate use but it's not like the Lord commands us to drink it! It is not a must. We are to be wary of what sparkles in the cup and goes down so smoothly (Prov 23:29-35). If there is temptation for some toward drunkenness, would it not be better to help keep our brothers and sisters from falling into sin by serving punch or pop or juices instead?

Without a doubt Christian weddings are causes for rejoicing and celebration! By all means, let's thoroughly enjoy them as gifts from our God and Redeemer! The Bible teaches us that our parties and celebrations are fully under the Lordship of Christ Jesus. There is a way to have good fun which fully honours his Lordship. Let's take up the challenge and make our wedding receptions all they can be!

Rev. Peter H. Holtvlüwer is minister of the Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church at Tintern, Ontario
holtvluer@bell.net

Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings from our bulletins...

QUOTABLE "QUOTES"

"There is nothing more irreligious than self-absorbed religion." *J.I. Packer*

"Faithfulness to God is our first obligation in all that we are called to do in the service of the gospel." *Iain H. Murray*

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

There is...

For every hectic work day there is a quiet rest...

For every painful experience there is a healing touch...

For every negative feeling there is an abiding joy...

For every disappointment there is a certain hope...

For every turbulent storm there is a sure foundation...

For every doubting thought there is a calm assurance...

For every hurtful action there is a forgiving love.

Roy Lessin

BIRTHS

DeVries, Mason – a son born to James and Leah – 20 December (Palmerston North)

Norman, Liam Whare – a son born to Tom and Miriam – 20 December (Pukekohe)

van der Werff, Ruby Leanna – a daughter born to Derek and Tracey – 28 December (Silverstream)

PROFESSIONS OF FAITH

Bishopdale: Neil Gallagher reaffirmed his faith

Masterton: Joel Arends, Tina Bruwer, Jessica Kloosterman, and Namfon Peacock

Pukekohe: Nicola Posthuma

WEDDINGS

27 December – Benjamin O'Neill and Briony Keast married in Wainuiomata

20 January – Bruce Nihoniho and Marianne de Jong married in Silverstream

21 January – Jeremy Eshelman and Lillian Hoyt married in Christchurch

4 February – Sam O'Neill and Helena de Reus married in Oamaru

DEATHS

Alberts, Martha – On 1 December the Lord called home Mrs. Alberts. She and her husband moved to Auckland to be with their son Jan (John) following the February earthquake. Their daughter Jane-Marie died in the collapsed PGC Building. Her granddaughter Summer Olliver was trapped and critically injured. Mr Jan Alberts (snr) has suffered a series of strokes and is now in full time care. Mr and Mrs Alberts were founding members of the Reformed Church of Christchurch.

Boom, Tineke – On January 4, Sr. Tineke Boom left this life – apparently after suffering a heart attack. Earlier that day, Tineke was able to give a good testimony to her assurance of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Lord's Providence she was surrounded by family who were already visiting her. As a congregation we extend our sympathy to Br. Bill and the wider family and assure the family of our prayers.

Roggema, Anno from the Wainuiomata Reformed Church died peacefully on January 13th. His funeral will be held at the Wainuiomata Reformed Church.

FROM THE PASTOR

Christchurch: Tim Rott

Palm Sunday is the day we remember when Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem as a King. The people received Him as an earthly King desiring to see the throne of David re-established in Jerusalem, but that was not what He had come for. Indeed, He came to be King, but King of their hearts and lives. He came to rule through His Word established in their hearts and minds. Little has changed. How many today still acknowledge Jesus as a good man, a great teacher yet they fail to acknowledge Him as Lord? As we approach Easter in the coming week, may each of us seek

to share the real reason why He came, and that we might desire many more in our city to acknowledge Him as Lord. May that desire in others be awakened as they see us making Jesus the King of our own lives, and in the lives of our families and church.

Masterton: Peter Kloosterman

The Celebration of Easter is something that should be rich in the praise of God's providence. Providence isn't just

↓ An Atheist's View on Life

I will live my life according to these beliefs

God does not exist

It is just foolish to think

That there is a God with a cosmic plan

That an all-powerful God brings purpose to the pain and suffering in the world

Is a comforting thought, however
It

Is only wishful thinking

People can do as they please without eternal consequences

The idea that

I am deserving of Hell

Because of sin

Is a lie meant to make me a slave to those in power

"The more you have, the happier you will be"

Our existence has no grand meaning or purpose

In a world with no God

There is freedom to be who I want to be

But with God

Life is an endless cycle of guilt and shame

Without God

Everything is fine

It is ridiculous to think

I am lost and in need of saving

↑ A Christian's View on Life

(Read from bottom to top to see the difference.)

about God's power to act. It is about the timing of His redemption. Redemption is a work developed in eternity with eternal consequences, but it occurs at God's appointed time. Deliverance from sins requires that we commit ourselves not only to God's Way of salvation, but also to God's time schedule. It occurs not in the nick of time, but the fullness of time. Salvation is accomplished

and applied when God says the time is right. The appointed time of Christ's death and His resurrection is written in God's diary not man's. The Bible records various plans to destroy Jesus: Herod at Jesus' birth; the Jewish leaders when He healed a man on the Sabbath (Jn. 5:18). The Jewish leaders even planned to avoid taking Jesus during the time of Passover (Mt. 26:5). But who can resist

the plan of God? Who can change His appointment?

MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

We warmly welcome **Rev William and Mrs Ann Renkema** to Dunedin, having arrived from Michigan, USA. We look forward to Rev Renkema's preaching and to getting to know you both. May the Lord richly bless your time in our midst.

Rev. André Scheepers has received and accepted a call to serve in the PCEA in Tasmania. He and Sue will move to Australia in February.

CHURCH BUILDINGS

Bishopdale: The building committee now has the building consent from the city council and is in the process of obtaining a price for the building works, which we expect to receive late January. Our current challenge is obtaining insurance, although it is our expectation that insurance situation will improve in the New Year, based on the advice we are receiving from insurers. All going well we are hoping to start construction in mid to late February. Due to building renovations the Reformed Church of Bishopdale will be worshipping at Papanui High School, 30 Langdons Road as from 5th February 2012. The services will remain at 10am and 5pm.

Christchurch: Session met with the Committee of Management to review developments around our building at 63 Cornwall St. COM has been pursuing concept plans and costings, as well as further geotechnical advice as a basis for decision making once the insurance settlement has been finalised. Unfortunately there have been some delays with the architectural work, however it is expected that the plans and costings will be available in the New Year. The meeting was helpful to clarify the three options that have been selected for detailed consideration.

The options are:

1. Retaining the auditorium (strengthened to current design standards) and replacement of the attached hall/kitchen/rooms on their current footprint.
2. Retaining the auditorium (strengthened to current design standards) and replacement of the attached hall/kitchen/rooms with an altered layout.
3. A clear site re-development, replacing both the auditorium and attached buildings with an altered layout. Options

You are invited to the

18th Hamilton Easter Convention

6th and 7th April 2012

Theme:

The Holy War

The Battle We All Face

Speaker:

REV. DAVID SCHULZ

Convention Venue:

Hamilton Reformed Church
11 Aberdeen Drive
Dinsdale, Hamilton

Meeting Times:

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

Convention addresses:

Friday

3.00pm

Understanding the Battle

(Christ the Seed of the woman, and the serpent. Genesis 3:1-15)

7.00pm

Christ the Conquering King

Isaiah 59:15-20; 63:1-6

Saturday

10.30am

Christ tempted by the devil

Matthew 4:1-11

1.00pm

Christ

our armour in the fight (1)

Ephesians 6:10-20

3.00pm

Christ

our armour in the fight (2)

Ephesians 6:10-20

Posters and pamphlets will be distributed



Our guest speaker this year is Rev. David Schulz from St Andrews Presbyterian Church, Hamilton, Victoria.

He introduces himself as follows:

I was raised in a Christian home in Melbourne and came to personal faith in Christ at the Billy Graham Crusade in 1969. I was first disciplined through the Christian Endeavour Movement within my local church and then later through the Navigators at Melbourne University where I completed a Music Degree in piano performance. After completing my degree I spent two and half years in India serving as an International Trainee with the Navigators. On returning from India I enrolled at the Presbyterian Theological College in Melbourne and became a candidate for the Presbyterian Ministry. I was ordained in 1987 and served as Minister of the Tatura Parish in Northern Victoria for 20 years. During this time I married Isabel and we have four children: Naomi (20) Philip (18) Caleb (14) Nathaniel (7). We moved to Hamilton in Victoria in 2007 where we have ministered now for 5 years. In my free time I still love to play my piano and work in the garden!

A bookstall will operate on Friday and Saturday

Inquiries

Pieter van der Wel
Ph. 07-853 3144
E-mail ecap2012@gmail.com

Bookings:

<http://easterconvention.rcnz.org.nz>

1 and 2 also hold the possibility of an early return to Cornwall St by completing earthquake strengthening to the auditorium and demolishing the hall/ kitchen/ rooms. Options 2 and 3 provide an opportunity to improve upon our current facilities, however may entail significant cost in addition to what insurance will pay.

In spite of the efforts of COM and others, no further information has been obtained from our insurer as to the value or date of the settlement. Please continue to support the COM with prayer and encouragement as they work through the practicalities of the challenging situation we face.

EVANGELISM

Hamilton – Beach Mission: As the Christmas and holiday season is upon us, it is the time for spreading the gospel at Raglan (and everywhere else of course). Date: 27 December, 2011 to 2 January, 2012

Palmerston North: A day of fasting and prayer has been set for Wednesday, February 8. The focus of this will be evangelism and missions.

MISSIONS

Christchurch: We have been invited to join in a practical mission trip to Tonga in July 2012 DV. At this stage 8 young men who are involved in the young men's bible study have indicated their desire/intention to go. The work they would be involved in is at St Andrews High School a co-educational school that has about 450 pupils. The school suffered considerable damage during cyclone Rene in 2010 and our young men would be assisting in the repair and refurbishment of some of the school buildings. It is our intention to pay our own costs, however we would like to raise some money to

donate towards the cost of materials and tools. We have a short DVD that we plan to show you at some stage but in the meantime we ask that you join us in prayer for these plans, that God will bless them and enable us to carry them out. You may ask why Tonga, why not our own mission work in Papua New Guinea. We discussed going to PNG with Alan and Odette Douma when they were here and simply they are not ready for us yet. Sometime in the next 12-24 months it is hoped that people will be able to visit PNG to assist in some of the work there.

DENOMINATIONAL

Advanced Easter Convention 2012

Notice: The 18th Hamilton Easter Convention will be held on 6th and 7th of April 2012 DV. Our speaker this year is Rev. David Schulz, currently minister at St Andrews Presbyterian Church, Hamilton, Victoria. The theme of his presentations will be *spiritual warfare*. More information is available on our website <http://rcnzonline.com/hamilton>

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Bucklands Beach: On Christmas Eve there will be a special outside candlelight/carol singing service in our church car park. We are planning this as an opportunity for praise and thanksgiving, but in particular as an outreach event. Please note this event in your dairy. The evening begins at 7.30pm as a social gathering at which we offer coffee and cake. The candlelight singing starts at 8.30pm.

Pukekohe: Prior to Christmas Rev. John Haverland and Vicar Erik Stolte went door to door in the neighbourhood around the church, inviting residents to our Christmas services. We were generally well received and had some useful conversations with some people.

CLASSES & COURSES

Pukekohe: Revelation Bible Study: Through this year I have been preaching through the book of Revelation. You may have questions that have come up as you have listened to these sermons. In mid-January I will lead a Bible study on the book of Revelation at the church. This is a mid-holiday Bible study for all who are not away on holidays and would like to attend. I will explain the main interpretations that people have of Revelation and the various ways people understand end-time prophecies. John Haverland

ACTIVITIES

Wainuiomata: Everyone is warmly invited to join us after the afternoon service for a fellowship dinner and then our Annual Christmas Singing Evening. Please remember to bring along some food for dinner for yourselves and visitors, and something yummy for supper afterwards.

South Island Presbytery Meeting on 19 November 2011

The Rev. Tim Rott opened the meeting, reading from 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 and leading in prayer.

Rules regarding recording what takes place in closed sessions were adopted (closed session minutes). They seek to balance the need for accurate records for future reference with the need to maintain confidentiality.

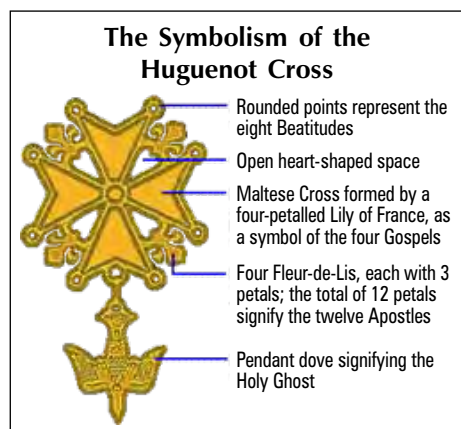
It was proposed that we send two delegates to every general meeting of the Overseas Missions Board. The motion was tabled. The Revs. Bruce Hoyt and Robert van Wichen will attend the next OMB meeting and then make recommendations to the Presbytery regarding the proposal.

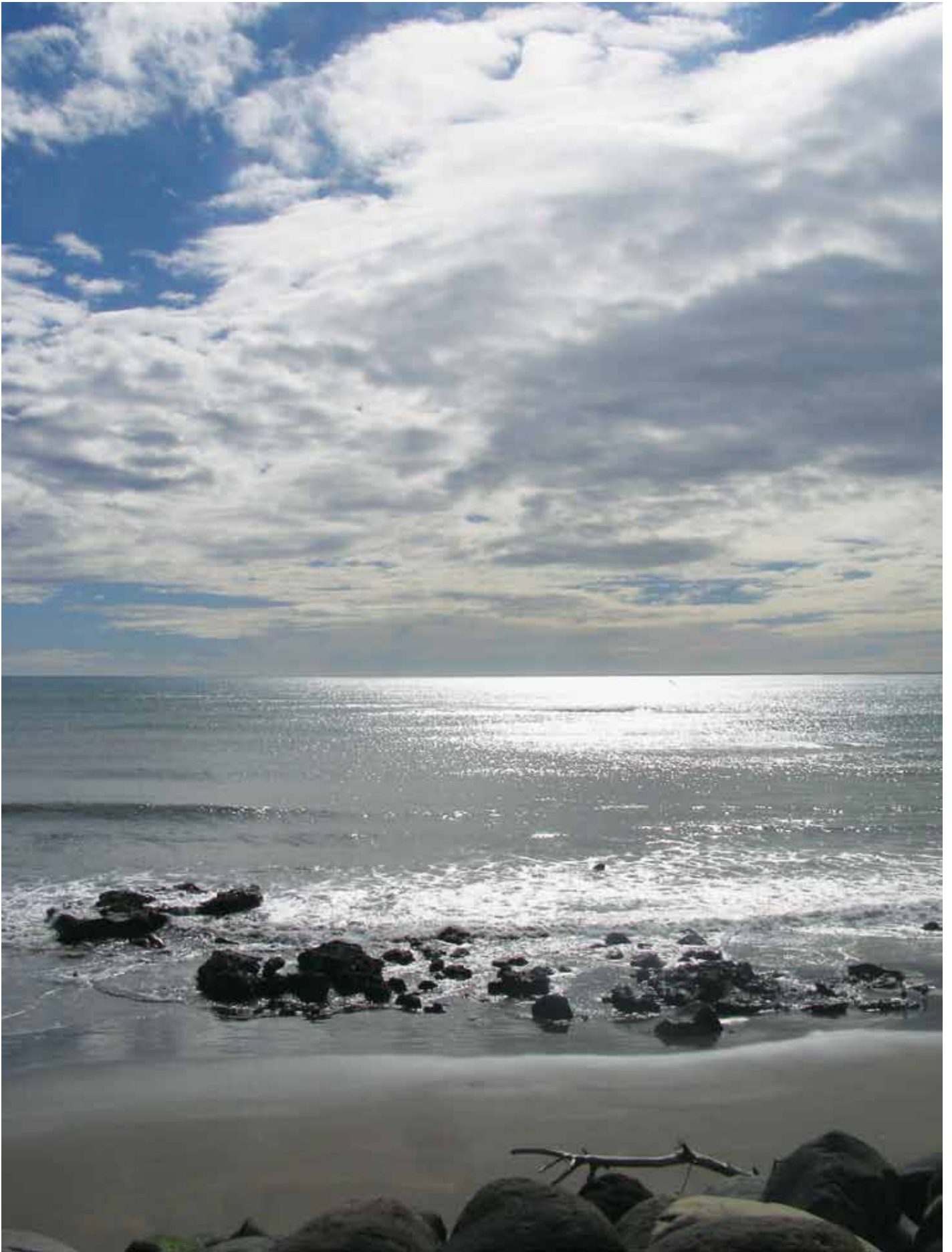
A report from the Reformed Theological College was received. The meeting was informed that Mr Graeme Zuidema is considering studying for the pastoral ministry; he will serve as a ministerial intern in the Reformed Church of Bishopdale next year.

The Reformed Church of Dunedin continues to search actively for a minister. Church visitation reports relating to Bishopdale, Dovedale and Nelson were received.

In the past, the regional youth camp and the Cadet and Calvinette camp were held over Queen's Birthday weekend. This has sometimes caused difficulties. Next year, the regional youth camp will be held over Labour weekend instead.

The Presbytery went into closed session. Four disciplinary cases were discussed and brought to God in prayer.





“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, As the waters cover the sea. Hab 2:14

Simona Landkroon – The New Plymouth coast