

faith in focus

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"He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."

Psalm 1:3



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Editorial

This month our ministers are attending the triennial Minister's Conference at Forest Lakes, near Otaki. The keynote speakers are Professor Cornel Venema, from Middle America Reformed Seminary, and the Rev. Frank van Dalen, well-known to many of us.

We pray that for them it may be a time of encouragement and equipping for the ministry of the Word. Those there will be a little older on average than previous times, showing that while our ministers are generally more experienced there are less entering the ministry now. This is a cause for concern - prayerful concern. For now, more than ever before, the Church and the ministry of the Word and Sacrament in the Church is at a low ebb. While mega-ministries trumpet the day of big things done through a 'super-apostle' the work of God's Spirit loves the day of small things done faithfully by thousands of those pastor-teachers who regard themselves least of all in God's work. This is the work which is being increasingly downgraded and yet it matters most of all. In the same way that the health of a local church is dependent upon a wise and committed eldership so that church needs a humble and dedicated minister bringing out the riches in God's Word each Lord's Day, and in the various classes, study and fellowship groups, and other teaching occasions.

It has been good to hear of the Jubilee celebrations around our country as so many give thanks for God's guidance and goodness over the past fifty years. There have been precious times of fellowship with old and young looking back and, like Israel of old, celebrating the Lord's great deeds. This issue continues looking at these events together, of which the obituary of the Rev. Bill Oppelaar forms part, too.

We continue with looking at another religion taking a foothold in our country - Hinduism. I read recently that a year ago there were just as many Indians as Australians in our country. This shows quite a change from how things have been. We need to know what they believe and how to respond to their questions.

Please note that the article 'Seeking the Sikhs', in the February 'Faith in Focus' was originally published in 'The Trumpet', the official magazine of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches of North America, with whom we have a reciprocal arrangement.

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*"The life-giving preacher is a man of God,
whose heart is ever athirst for God,
whose soul is following hard after God,
whose eye is single to God,
and in whom by the power of God's Spirit
the flesh and the world have been crucified;
his ministry is like the generous flood of a life-giving river.
Life-giving preaching costs the preacher much -
death to self, crucifixion to the world,
the travail of his own soul.
Only crucified preaching can give life.
Crucified preaching can come only from a crucified man.*

E.M. Bounds

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

Music and the future

The why, what and who of Church music

Benjamin Hoyt

Introduction

Last year I set out to prepare a youth group study on singing, specifically singing in worship. The target audience grew from just our youth group to anyone who wished to come, and so the project sprouted from the smallest mustard seed and became a large tree. It was an evening of learning and music, of discussion, and of carrot soup.

A few weeks later, three persons (indeed, ministers of the Word!) attacked me at night and forced me to write for *Faith in Focus* a summary of it all. The problem with this, I said, was that the presentation loses half of its impact without the musical excerpts I played during the evening. But then I heard the chilling sound of a knife being sharpened, and soon gave in to their wish. And that's the history, true and exact.

I write this as an amateur musician and a layman, with no qualification but the usual: a Bachelor in Hating Piano Practice as a Child (BHPPC). Nevertheless, some research has gone into it, so it might hold together even without all the music.

First up, the obvious: God commands us to sing as we worship Him, so singing is hugely important. We'll be looking here at both why we sing and what to sing (the original also touched on how to sing, but space said no). These topics are fun, but they can also be controversial, so I'm going to try to be careful as well as honest. I don't have all the answers by any means, but I'm hoping to provide some overall *direction*. Besides, the idea is not that you'll agree with every jot and tittle; rather I want to encourage serious *thought*.

Why do we sing?

We already know one reason: we sing to worship God. The Psalms are full of worship, petitions, and praise for God.

But singing is more than just worship. We'll be using Colossians 3:16 quite a bit, so I quote:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Teaching and admonishing one another! We usually totally miss that point and think our singing is "just to God." It's for each other too—teaching and even rebuking when we need it; all so the

word of Christ dwells in us richly. The Psalms are very worshipful, but they are also full of teaching content: about God, His world, His creation, His people, *et cetera*.

Another interesting thing I'd never seen before is in Psalm 60—it has an introduction which says:

To the Chief Musician. Set to [the tune of] "Lily of the Testimony." Of David. For teaching. When he fought against Mesopotamia...

Once again, *for teaching*. This Psalm is a prayer to God and full of content. If we're going to sing in worship at all, we must follow the examples of the songs in Scripture. And if we have church musicians, they must be well-schooled in the Bible's teaching. (In our discussion after the talk,



someone rightly said that worship music is easily important enough to have paid musicians who help lead. Our pastors are paid for teaching; why muzzle the oxen who teach through music?)

Martin Luther, a great pastor and a fine musician, said, "A minister who knows nothing about music is worthless to me." Luther was an artistic hymn writer who knew the Scriptures, and as a result, his words have real, Biblical teaching content. The Church needs more men like that today: musicians who know how to teach the Word, and elders and ministers who have studied and practiced music. (Aside: It is often said that Luther stole all his melodies from the pub songs of the day. As fun as this might be, it is nothing more than a very distorted Chinese whisper. For some good information, see <http://www.cuis.edu/ftp/wittenberg/>

[luther_and_bar_tunes.-9608](#))

So why do we sing? Two main reasons: to worship God, and to teach each other.

What should we sing?

Here I'll try to apply the "why"s stated above. Each sub-section ends with a question that can be used to test a song's quality on that point.

Wrong-headed singing

First we must get rid of two wrong extremes. One is the "new music is evil" camp. These are the people who hold that anything newer than World War II is automatically bad. But new is not wrong: God calls us to work hard and to create art, and this involves making new things. But "new" in the Bible never means totally new and different.

Think about the *New Testament* versus the *Old*. It's new material, but it builds on the old. As we create new songs, we build on the past, on musical history.

Then there are those who say that "old music is evil." But neither is old wrong. If it were, then your grandfather would be wrong. Besides, did you know that *all* our rock and pop music is based on a musical system that's about 500 years old? (Thanks to modern education, *Westlife* are just now learning the chords that Mozart had figured out by the time he was three.) The Bible even goes so far as to suggest that youth can be foolish, and that wisdom comes with age. Hard words for us 80's kids.

It's simplifying, of course, but I think we've got both camps in the Church today. I also believe the "old music is evil" camp is probably the more harmful. But old versus new is not really the issue: we must head in a totally different direction.

Appropriate music

Our music is worship, and worship to God. He is no tame toy God: He's our Father, the Saviour, and the King of Kings. A good starting point is to think about kings and queens here on earth. A king is majestic, awe-inspiring, wise. Music may be fitting for this, or it may not.

Let's have a look at what I mean. We've all enjoyed *Scripture in Song*, and worshipped God with it, too. Turn to number 46, *Surely Goodness and Mercy*. Sing it to the words "Haylah Shaylah, haylah shaylah, ya da day do-o dah, all the days, all the days of my life..." It fits, right? The music says, "I'm an Australian campfire song!" while the words try to worship God. Compare this with Luther's *A Mighty Fortress is our God*. Even brave men can sing that one.

That's just one example, but unfortunately *SinS* has more than enough. A lot of it is 70's and 80's pop music re-hashed, then there's a bit of

Christianized cowboy music from the 40's, and most of the rest is Sunday School music. *SinS* is already very retro, mainly because it was built on a foundation of quicksand. Why do we fall in love with such as this? It's bad



music, *not* because it's evil and sinful, but because it's inappropriate and trite. Jehovah is not trite.

Music has meaning

Way before words coming along, music, by itself, has meaning. That's why movie music is so effective: the music is saying what the movie is saying. So *The Matrix* has that hard-core, heavy music during the fight scenes. It says "violent!" all the way through, and it fits so well you don't even notice it's there. Our worship music should be the same: so good, so *meaningful*, that we hardly notice it. It has to support our singing instead of sticking out. (*Star Wars*, *The Mission*, and *The Lord of the Rings* are other examples of movies with music that speaks.)

Drums are brilliant, and used often in meaningful music (check out any of the above). But we've forgotten how to use them. Now, instead of adding, they subtract—they've become *meaningless* repetition. Loud beats may be cool, but often they mean that the music is so boring you need a beat to hold it together. Take any one of Britney Spears' beats (it's not hard—there are only about two). Even when she's not singing, the beat says "I luv U 4eva baby!" And when you try to say that and "Christ is King!" at the same time, you fail. So instead we try to say, "I just luv U like, 4eva, Jesus!" and then wonder why the world laughs at us.

The loud and clashing cymbals of the Psalms must have been impressive. Not impressive in the sense of glitter, stage lights, and Neil Diamond—maybe it was more like a great anthem.

If music has meaning, then some music has better meaning than other music. In other words, there are absolutes in music, just like in everything else. Denny's is better than MacDonald's, and U2 is better than Britney Spears. But a wedding feast is far superior to Denny's, and Beethoven far superior to U2. We must never lose sight of a person's taste, but these tastes must not be an excuse for poor quality or shallow music. Imagine someone who thought baked beans on toast was the greatest food ever. It would be right and good to help him acquire a taste for barbequed chicken and other Real Foods, but you'd want to do it carefully, lest he think you were some elitist trying to push your tastes on him. Taste can be learnt.

Also remember that some music is so complex that it sounds bad the first time, weird the second, okay the third, great the fourth, and just keeps getting better and better. Much popular music is so shallow that it sounds awesome the first time, dull the second, bad the third, and just keeps

getting worse. Musical good things take time, too.

What about modern art? Modern art is not shallow, but instead it's often deep in a bad way. Take some insane painting with blobs all over it. On the surface it's fine: no nudes, no swear-words,

really not much at all. But if you *study* it, you discover that the black blob in the middle means "I hate God," or something. Seriously! And you can do the same thing with music. For my presentation, I composed a simple piano theme called *Fate-Chaos*. With no words at all it said, "Fate, ominous motion, destiny" with the left hand, and "Chaos, randomness, absurdity" with the right. No words, yet in a way it was in high rebellion against God.

I believe it's one of the Church's jobs to create good music with good meaning. But if we're to learn how to do this, it would pay to go to music school and study, not turn on Hits FM.

Beauty and quality

The obvious fact is that our music is for God, so it must be good. Philippians 4:8 will help:

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.

This is the Bible's way of looking at art. Pure, excellent, praiseworthy. And Psalm 33:3 says to "play *skilfully* with a shout of joy." In Old Testament times the skills were learnt by a special group of Levites. They would come to the feasts, twice a year, and play and sing with the people before God. That's two weeks of the year, but what about the other fifty? They would create new music. Teach people the Psalms. Learn and practise! For better or worse, the God we serve calls us to sweat.

One reasonable test of music quality is how long it takes to make. If someone can do piano or guitar for a year and then jam away for twenty minutes to create a masterpiece, then it probably isn't one. A friend and I (both of us untrained song-writers) threw together a lovely chorus called *He Died on the Cross For Me*. Ad-libbing all the way, man! But what is it worth? Fifteen minutes for two guys, or about ten bucks: not good money for a Holy God. And was it the best? No—it used the same old chords, same old trite patterns as most other praise choruses in the book. Including some Secret Recipe Chords (TM) that will make any good Charismatic raise his hands. It's the spiritual equivalent of boy-band music.

There is some pretty good Contemporary Christian Music out there—I rate Michael Card. But CCM, unfortunately, has swallowed the business model hook, line, and sinker. All the songs are copyright, and when your church buys the overheads you get a free CD with a lovely

cover picture of Michael W. Smith. In reality, church music should not be an industry, but a ministry.

Just a note about Art. All art, music most of all, uses repetition. Christian art must not have vain repetition, but meaningful repetition. Every note must mean something. About every phrase we compose we should be able to say, "that's beautiful; it took skill to create."

Congregational music

Remember that our music must teach us, and for this reason it must be congregational—each singing to the other, and all singing to God. That's why hymns can be so powerful: they have harmony, the rhythms aren't too bad, and you can get 200 people singing them all together. Rock music today is very much about solo singers and bands. Nothing wrong with that, but when we copy it in church, we get music very good for the pretty girl singer up the front, but terribly hard for hundreds of people to sing together.

I went to City New Life in Christchurch recently, and they have good music. Well, loud anyway, and to be fair, within their own style they do a great job. But the band is doing all the work. If the singer up the front is good, everything's okay, because she's got a microphone. The other people are trying to clap to the beat, or maybe singing, or chatting away and laughing in the back. It might be fun, it might be worship, but it's not *congregational* worship. Whatever music we choose, the whole church needs to be able to sing it, together, in any kind of weather.

And apart from our music, I believe we need more congregational response throughout the worship. I don't mean everyone doing his own "Yes, Lord's", but I do mean an ordered dialogue. We have to start simple: the whole church thundering a unison *Amen* at the end of the congregational prayer or the Scripture readings. Or a "congregational response" version of Psalm 136 (it's intended that way).

The Church today should worship in song, but do not forget that both the Church through the ages and the angels in heaven are singing with us. This means we must sing the songs of the Church of all ages (there are some beautiful ancient hymns in our book: 327, 331, 355, 444, 464). We may throw out the bad ones, of course (459), but if we do away with them all, we are Sinning. I'd like to think that's not too strong a word.

Great lyrics

Words are important for two reasons. First, we have to *teach* each other, so the words must actually *say* something. Second, they must say enough so that "the word of Christ will dwell in us richly."

Whenever in doubt about lyrics, compare them to the Psalms. Do they speak in the same kind of way about God? Do they give "praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation"? Do the words, just, like, wanna make you just praise Jesus, man? Beware praise choruses in this regard:

some of them may as well be straight from Ricky Martin. *"I just wanna dance!"* is the title of a praise chorus, as well as a Whitney Houston album—the 101st way to get teenyboppers to worship God.

We also need to sing the whole counsel of God. Praise is good, but we must not forget to confess, to pray, to thank, to mourn, to trust.

And is it just sentimental? There's a difference between emotion and sentimentality. Emotion is joy, praise, love, power, and even hate. Sentimental stuff is romantic slush, honey-sweet, and shallow. It's easy to find slush today, but even easier in some 19th century hymns. Austin Miles' song, *"I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses..."*, both music and words, could be straight from a kissy scene in *The Sound of Music*. If you were a bit effeminate you might sing it to your lover, but not to the King of the world! Here's a good test: when you see in our Psalter Hymnal the words "raptured soul," "blissful state," "sweet voice," or "precious fountain", you know you've found a "slovely swaltz with 19th-century spoetry."

The Scriptures are full of emotion, but not warm fuzzies. Most of the Psalms, for example, were written by David: a strong man, a leader and warrior, yet a servant who loved God. When we create or look for lyrics, we should follow his example.

With lyrics, and this applies to all music, we must go deeper than a swear-word count. Too many Christians think that if a song doesn't have any swear words or blasphemy, it's okay. Or the reverse—just because a song has some dubious bits may not mean we must never listen to it. I am not usually a lover of rock, but *Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen is my favourite in the genre. Some throw out the song as soon as it mentions Beelzebub (Satan), but by that reasoning, you'd have to throw out the Bible. The lyrics are worth serious thought, and you have to analyse the words *in context*. They're weird and dark, but no one knows quite what they mean, and Freddie Mercury wouldn't give much away. As for musical interest, the song is fair: I'd rate it at a "Mozart when he was 11" level.

Words and music should be married together. If the lyrics are joyful, the music must be joyful. If they are crying out, the music must cry, too. There are some classics in our Psalter Hymnal, both good and bad. Number 50 says, *O Lord, to Thee I Cry*, and the music does cry! But number 195 is unfitting, particularly the ending—it's hard to "rejoice" on an A-minor plagal cadence, even if it can be done. It's great music, but it tries to have an affair with the words instead of being their husband...and affairs always end in minor.

Conclusion

To conclude, I want to put down a few important thoughts, remembering the title of the article.

We must sing heartily to God—both to worship Him and to teach each other. Because it's to Him, it must be the best, and it must be beautiful. And because it's also to help

us, it must have real content and meat.

In the days of Bach, basically all music was produced by the Church, and usually the secular world tried to copy that. The Church was a huge influence on the culture—a real salt and light. Today we've lost that, and we're doing almost the opposite. Instead of the Church changing the world with Christ, we baptise what the world does and then take it on board. That's letting *them* be a salt and light to *us!* We need to get back to setting godly, cultural standards for the whole world to see. That takes a lot of work and prayer, but we have to start somewhere.

Also, we need to realise when we've had enough milk and get onto the meat. There's so much shallowness out there that *we need to be*

deep. We need to think, to work, and to learn about the meat from people older and wiser than us.

And lastly, we need to encourage a respect for the past. We must study history and think about the future. God calls us not to just look down at the ten years around our feet, but to look backward, to pray and work, and *then* move forward into the future.

We serve a God who cares about generations, and so we must be *long-distance* Christians.

A lot of this material springs from some excellent talks that Leonard Payton gave at a conference a few years back. Contact historian Sally Davey or myself for copies of his tapes.

JUBILEE

THEN, NOW AND TOMORROW!

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach
(one of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand)
plans to celebrate 50 years of the Lord's goodness to us
on 13th and 14th September 2003

The programme will include:
Saturday afternoon – Recreational Entertainment for all ages
Saturday evening – Family Anniversary Dinner
Sunday – Celebratory Service followed by Luncheon

Guest Preacher: Dr Murray Capill

Links with Bucklands Beach?
Don't miss this opportunity to renew old friendships this side of Glory!

To help us with planning, expressions of interest would be appreciated

Please return the slip below by 17th May to:

"Anniversary"
Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach
PO Box 39 275 Howick Auckland
or email: mbrooks@clear.net.nz

I am interested in attending your 50th Anniversary Celebrations

Please send me further information as it becomes available

Name.....

Address.....

Phone No.....(please print)

Number of people(over 12 years)

.....(under 12 years)

Books in focus

Geneva Book Reviews

Why I left the Contemporary Christian Music Movement

by Dan Lucarini

The issue is here already. It will not go away. Some have made significant steps in the journey.

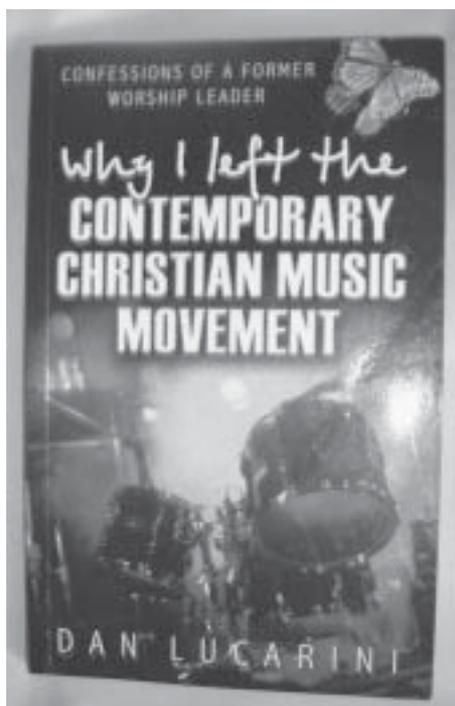
A somewhat clumsy title for a book which is both topical and relevant to folks on both sides of the musical fence. In the forward it quotes John Calvin "we know by experience that music has a secret and almost incredible power to move hearts" and therefore we should give its use in the life of the church serious and God centered attention.

The author, Dan Lucarini was a former worship leader and musician. As a convert to the faith he brought with him his wealth of experience in the secular music world. He was an agent for change with in the CCM movement and responsible for its introduction in several evangelical and fundamental churches. He did this with genuine enthusiasm and conviction that this was the best way for churches to move forward and to reach the modern world for the Lord. What is more he excelled at this "ministry". Despite this something radical happened to this mans attitude to the point where he repents of this and understands the CCM movement to be fundamentally flawed. This book is very much the testimony, biblical analysis, and "trumpet shout" of a Godly man who seeks to warn us all. We must listen very carefully.

Defining terms

It is important to understand what Lucarini is speaking of. By CCM he means music styles which include soft rock, pop, as well as heavily syncopated music with rock influences such as jazz, blues, hip-hop, modern country and western. He particularly seems to be referring to music which has a heavy dependence on a rock beat. He would argue that some contemporary songs are acceptable as long as the emphasis is on melody and harmony (which rules out the vast majority of CCM or praise and worship music.)

Lucarini's arguments begins by examining the underlying philosophy of the Praise and Worship movement. He defines this as "we can use any contemporary music style in our Praise and Worship services and God will accept it." He identifies this as being closely aligned to the **Acceptance doctrine** ("Come as you are, God accepts you where you are at") and the tolerance movement popular in secular society. He presents this as a dishonest account of the gospel – contrary to the relaxing atmosphere and



contemporary music there the bible is full of judgements, Christ has a definite agenda for our life which as he expresses it "has nothing to do with our comfort zone" Discipleship is not a self esteem journey : growth means change, change means loss and loss is always painful. You cannot keep your old habits and pleasures". He points out that "come as you are " is more often misinterpreted "remain as you are" at least as far as music, language clothing and social habits are concerned. Yet the bible clearly refutes this eg 1 Peter 1:16 (you shall be Holy for I am Holy", 1 Peter 2:11 "abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul". Thus "we can not come to God just as we are, with our sin unconfessed or ignored or draped all over us and still expect (God's) acceptance. We can not drag our favourite worldly music, dress and language into the church and expect a blessing!" "...Acceptance doctrine is so pervasive in some fellowships that Christians are no longer allowed to question another Christians behaviour or personal preferences..."

Thus he maintains that we have traded biblical discernment for tolerance of all forms of worldliness- which has opened the doors of our churches to immorality and deception.

Lucarini's central argument boils down to this: God is a Holy God. He is totally "other". He is a consuming fire. He demands Holy worship in the way that He proscribes. The biblical pattern is that worship must also be Holy and separate in as much as a sinful but redeemed people can offer. It MUST not even have a hint of contemporary paganism. It must not conform to the secular fashions and ape the musical styles of this world.

To do so will not please God but will rather incur his wrath. We can not do other.

A further concern

Another major thrust of his argument is that Contemporary music is so thoroughly associated with worldliness and immorality that "Christianizing" the lyrics is simply not enough to remove the connection. Friendship with the world is enmity to God (1John 2:15) . We are to avoid even the appearance of sin. He testifies that this connection has been a stumbling block to many. "Today" writes Lucarini "we are seeing behaviour that was once considered shameful or immoral being displayed publicly on a regular basis in the church.. "am I the only one to notice ...provocative dresses or tight revealing clothing and doing so on the platform in full view of the congregation? They are imitating secular female artists who dress that way deliberately to tease and tempt men..." When you combine sensual dancing with the immodest dress of the women on the platform you place a very large stumbling block in front of the men of the congregation."

Whose heart?

A major call within the CCM movement is to find the "true heart of worship" This in itself is very commendable. Lucarini also argues that in the vast majority of contemporary churches (as well as some traditional churches our worship practices) have strayed far from true biblical worship because we have built the foundation on the needs of men rather than on the word of God.

The OT Hebrew word for worship is most commonly "Shachah" which Strongs concordance defines as "depress, to prostrate, bow down, humbly beseech." The NT Greek word *proskuneo* has a very similar meaning.

Lucarini points out that in modern worship the preference is to raise hands and faces rather than bowing and feeling lowly. God is a jealous God. He was not pleased with the improvisations of those who offered up "strange fire" in worship (associated with the pagan worship rites of the day.) He was not pleased with those who sought to worship and God in their "own way" from every high place- rather than as he had prescribed at the temple at Jerusalem. He was not pleased when they mixed true worship with idolatrous practices. God judged these things harshly. Lucarini asks how than can we expect God to accept our worship when offered with musical styles which are today used by pagans for there immoral practices?

Worship is to be God centred. The CCM is by design man-centred. The worship team at the front is the focus of attention. The styles of music are performance based and not only sound like a performance or concert, but make it difficult for the congregation to sing as well. The congregation inevitably can not compete with the electronically

augmented vocalists nor the ubiquitous driving beats both "belting it out" He argues that in fact heavily syncopated music is harder to learn and to sing along with and his observation is that congregational singing is consistently poorer as a result. The temptation is therefore the pew sitter to be entertained and listen to the expert performers rather than fully participate.

CCM tends to emphasize the music at the expense of God's word. The primary motive in selection of music tend to be "do the people like it" rather than "does God like it". The primary indicator of a successful service tends to be experienced based rather than truth based ("I was really convicted by the word").

Bad theology

In contrast CCM is often the vehicle for the introduction of bad theology. Songs come and go so quickly and are very sensitive to changes in current ideologies which happen to be on the contemporary scene. An obvious example is the New Age movement. (I was at a contemporary service recently where I found rather than

worshiping a Holy God we were singing in Praise of the Mother planet. It was painful and pathetic to see well meaning old folk trying to sing along with a heavily syncopated CD with simply awful lyrics while a Hymn book with a wealth of biblical Hymns lay idle.)

In the remainder of his book he deals with a variety of other issues related to this area: eg. the divisive fruits of this movement and the havoc it has reeked in the church; isn't all music inherently good? (NO!); isn't this just a matter of personal preference and taste?; isn't music amoral?; the fruits of CCM and the slippery slope of the blended services (which he believes are merely a transitional phase to move a church service from traditional to all contemporary in its content). So he deals with many objections to these arguments in the book.

In sum

In summary Lucarini makes some excellent and thought provoking comments. We must all read it and listen carefully. It is by no means a definitive or last word on this area., but is a good place to

start and I would certainly commend this book to all of our members. Interestingly that he does not write this from inside a reformed tradition and perhaps as a result some of the biblical analysis is a little brief but never the less essentially sound.

Some, but certainly not all, of his arguments are based on his experience and therefore some of his assertions are perhaps an over simplification of a complex phenomenon "(CCM's acceptance into the church came into being out of our self indulgence and lusts, that it has been justified by deceptive arguments and that it is fuelled by our desire for music that feeds our sinful nature. We have been deceived into believing that we can use any style of music in our worship and that God accepts it...")

Martin Minnée

Palmerston North.

This book can be ordered from Geneva Books, 13 Tararua St, Upper Hutt geneva.books@octaholdings.co.nz

Children & church conflict

Keeping the family in the family

Barbara Cross

It was one of those nasty church splits that caused grief, pain, anger and bitterness to the members of a small Bible-believing church. The congregation was torn down the middle as they sided for or against the minister and his actions. We were very close to one family who were members of that warring church. We, as a young couple, saw this terrible conflict destroy our friends' relationships with fellow Christians, dominate their thinking and embitter their spirits. Whenever we spent time with them, the details of the continuing church battle were the main topic of conversation. Being on one side of the division, there were sharp words spoken against those on the opposite side. Church problems and criticisms were freely aired in front of the family's children. They daily heard the on-going details of the church crisis and the faults of the Christians involved in the controversy.

In time, the problems were somewhat resolved. A different minister was called. New leadership was chosen. Our friends were happy with the outcome, but the results of that period of church conflict began to show up very clearly in the lives of their children. They started to rebel at going to church. Disparaging remarks were made about the members of the congregation. Now, as adults, they live totally separated from spiritual things and look with disdain on the church and Christianity. In contrast to the older children who were involved in the crisis, the children of

that family who were too young to understand what was happening during that troubled time have gone on to follow the Lord and be part of His church.

What we decided to do

After observing the effect that this conflict had in the lives of these older children, we made a decision that we would have to be very careful as to how we would deal with our own children, if we should go through times of disagreement or conflict with other Christians.

It is a regrettable fact of life, that due to the remaining sin in all of us, divisions and difficulties between Christian believers will come into our personal lives and church life. One of the great mistakes that our friends made, and many Christian parents make, is discussing these problems before the children. It is often unnecessary, and almost certain to bring spiritual harm to them. Sometimes this is done in small ways, such as when critical remarks are made before the children about the Sunday morning sermon or other aspects of the church services as families travel home from church. This discussion might even turn, as one man described it, into having "roast preacher" for Sunday dinner! Naturally, there are going to be things that we would prefer to do differently, and even some matters with which we strongly disagree, but we must be careful about voicing these criticisms before young children.

The reasons why

There are reasons why it is important to be careful about what we say. The first is that young children are unable to separate the one area or person with which we disagree from the church life as a whole. To criticise the preaching of the pastor, the leadership of the elders, the teaching of a Sunday School teacher may give a message to the child that the church, as a whole, is a flawed and possibly that it is a worthless institution. Children tend to see a criticism of a part as a reason for rejection of the whole.

Another reason for caution in what we say before them is that children are not as able, as a mature adult should be, to disagree with a fellow Christian and yet, at the same time, continue to see him or her as a valuable Christian brother or sister. To disagree in part, in a child's mind, can be seen to disapprove of or to reject the other person completely.

Therefore, with small children it is best to be very careful about expressing our differences with other believers either by our words or our actions. Church problems or differences about which we need to speak should be done in a private situation removed from their hearing.

When they heard what others said

While we made it our rule not to discuss church difficulties in the hearing of our children, we often found that others were careless about their statements in front of them. People would come

to our home and would blurt out personal problems about themselves, their family or the church in front of our children. We simply made it a rule, where necessary, to say politely, "Would you mind if we discussed this privately?" We also taught our children that if people began to speak of private matters and they were asked to leave the room and go somewhere else to play, they were not to question why they must leave, nor were they to ask questions about private conversations.

There are times that, though one may be careful about what is said, and one tries to keep others from speaking unwisely, the children will hear things said anyway. It is important that they be taught from a very young age that such remarks or conversations are not to be repeated to others. If they are unsure about what is to be kept secret, they should be instructed to check with their parents.

With older children, it is not always possible to protect them from knowing problems or differences that are happening. How do we deal with that? Again, we need to be cautious about making unnecessary critical remarks in front of them. However, there are times that details have to be told and problems discussed. In doing this, we must be very careful how we handle this situation so as not to destroy their love of fellow Christians and regard for the Church of Jesus Christ.

A personal example

We went through such an occasion in our lives. A big difference developed between us and another church leader. Though we tried to resolve this problem in a scriptural manner, the man was unwilling to meet with us and to seek reconciliation. It was a painful and very sad time for us and it led to a situation where we felt we could no longer be in a working relationship with this Christian brother. Our children were older at the time, and could not help knowing what was happening as the problem was forcing us to make changes that affected our whole family.

As we talked with our children, we began first by affirming that while we had a problem in our relationship with this man, we did not deny that he was a real Christian brother. It was important for them to see that we did not write him off as a genuine believer.

The second thing we explained was that, while we could not agree with his words and actions, we were trying to give him the benefit of the doubt as to the cause of his actions. It was important to teach them that only God can know the motives of the heart.

The third way we dealt with the problem was by admitting to them that we were not without sin in our own words and attitudes. It was especially humbling for me to have to say to my own daughters that I was angry and full of bitterness

over the situation. I told them, however, that I was seeking God's forgiveness and help for my attitude, and I asked them to pray for me as I struggled with my own sinful heart. I knew I must show them, that even though a Christian, I still had to work through the effects of remaining sin in my life, just as they also had to do.

Last of all, we made sure that our children saw us continuing to make efforts to restore that broken relationship. It was necessary for them to know that we did not desire to have our fellowship shattered with a Christian brother. We continued to work toward repairing that relationship, and we and our children rejoiced when God granted us the joy of reconciliation.

As older children, with more Christian training and understanding than they would have had at a younger age, we felt that they were able to understand that Christians are not perfect, and do not always get along in this life. We gave them Bible illustrations where godly men have disagreed such as Paul and Barnabas. They prayed with us as we sought the Lord's help in the situation and they were able to see that true Christians are not hypocrites. They also saw that true Christianity, though often a struggle, is not a sham.

None of us can call our children to saving faith. That is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet, we bear great responsibility to do nothing that will hinder them in coming to Christ as their Saviour. We are responsible for living lives before them that will make true Christianity something that, with the work of the Holy Spirit, they will desire to follow. We must be careful in all ways of living the Christian life before our family, but particularly we must practice great care in this area. If we now face, or, in the future experience, times of disagreement and division through church conflict we must not give our children an excuse to turn away from the Lord and His church. It is important that we, who desire the best for them spiritually, do nothing to destroy their confidence in God's church or God's people through our careless talk and attitudes.

(This article is reproduced from the "Network", the magazine of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales. Barbara Cross is the wife of the Rev. David Cross, the Presbytery Clerk.)

CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCHES

singles convention

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We asked that you remember the planing committee in your prayers, that we may honour God and serve you well in the preparations we make for this convention.

On behalf of the planning committee,
David Vander Reyden - contact number 02 45765469
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A feminine focus

The story of one spiritual mother and daughter

Sally Davey

Christians have always known that the faith is to be passed on in a personal way. To be sure, the gospel needs to be proclaimed by clear preaching of the Word. But Christianity is also a person-to-person faith; a way of life that we need to learn by living alongside others. And this has been true from the beginning. Jesus had His disciples "with Him", (Mark 3:14) so that they could see Him, hear what He said, learn how He lived, and so be imitators of Him. When He told them to "go and make disciples of every nation" (Matthew 28:19) He intended that we should make friends of those we tell the gospel to; and by inviting them to share something of our lives, show them how to live out the faith in practical, everyday ways.

And this includes us women. Perhaps you spend most of your time at home with your husband and children? You might have thought disciple-making is something missionaries do – people who give up all home comforts, even marriage, and give their lives overseas? But the idea, the original idea, is so simple and adaptable – it applies to all of us, whatever way we live our lives to God's glory. Paul explained this when he wrote to Titus, telling him how to instruct the church in Crete. In Chapter 2 of this letter Paul gave specific instruction on discipleship for different groups in this local church body. "teach the older women," he wrote, "to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good." Why? Not just for their own good, but so that they can then "train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God." (Titus 2:3-5) This is the idea: live lives that imitate Christ, so that we can then teach this way of life, and the truth from which it comes, to younger women.

Spiritual mothering

Susan Hunt, among others, has developed this idea fully as it applies to us women in the 21st century. In her book, *Spiritual Mothering*, she paints a very attractive and motivating picture of how older women might disciple younger women in the faith, showing them how to honour Christ

in the calling to which God has called them. She says this happens

"When a woman with faith and spiritual maturity enters into a nurturing relationship with a younger woman in order to encourage and equip her to live for God's glory."

But it is an idea natural to Christians who are serious about their faith; and it is something a mature Christian woman will want to do even without training in the concept. What follows here is the story of two women, one older, and one younger. Neither had heard of "Spiritual Motherhood" (as explained by Susan Hunt and others); but both desired a helpful spiritually-minded friendship. Neither was part of a big or organised women's church fellowship. They tell their story simply to give thanks for the friendship God gave them; and to show that much can be gained by an older woman teaching Christian life-skills to a younger woman.

One story

This is what Kathryn (not her real name) writes:

"We were country members of the Reformed Church, two hours distance from the church itself. A young man, who had taken a job in a local industry, on completion of his university studies, had been given our address by a mutual acquaintance. When he phoned, we invited him for a meal. He was looking for board, he told us, so my husband suggested he could stay with us. Our children were happy with the idea, and we had the room to spare. Before the evening was out it was all arranged."

The young man, I will call him John, had just become engaged, and was to be married in the New Year. Because he was from a Reformed family, we wanted to welcome and help him. We would not otherwise have looked to have a boarder.

After some weeks, we were introduced to his fiancée, I will call her Maria. She actually stayed with a friend of ours, at John's insistence. He felt that it wasn't right, to have her staying here with us as well. Maria was a friendly girl, quietly spoken, and not talkative. I remember that she had some tar on her jeans and white jersey, which I was able to remove completely. Maybe that helped to give her some confidence in me. We were invited to their wedding. That was nice, since we had not known them long.

They rented a farm cottage, a few kilometres out of town. I felt trusted when John gave me a key and asked me to make up their double bed, before they got home from their honeymoon. It was a privilege, and my daughter and I tried to make the room look nice.

My husband and John had a love of games, like sjoule, which we could all play, and table tennis. They were fairly evenly matched, and that made for serious competition. On Sundays we had a tape service, at our home, and John and Maria joined us for worship, and lunch. We began to alternate between their home and ours for services. My husband and John took turns leading the services. John's sincere desire to please God and walk in His way was attractive to us. He was young, but he had set his course.

When my husband and I were married, I had left a busy career, as a midwife. It was a life I had taken pleasure in. Coming to live in my husband's hometown was a big change for me. I worked for a few months, but before long I became pregnant. I experienced a few problems early in the pregnancy, so I finished work. I busied myself preparing for our baby, and was content as I knitted and sewed and spun, also getting to know a few people.

I could identify with Maria, out in the country, away from family, and friends. John had to be away overnight sometimes, and we invited Maria to spend that time with us. Then when John was going to be away, and I was also going away for a few days, I invited Maria to come with me. She was expecting a baby by this time, and I did not like to think of her alone, in the cottage, at night.

We were getting to know each other. I appreciated her thoughtful conversation, and babies and pregnancy (which I considered my area of expertise, having children of my own).

Their garden had once been beautiful and well loved. The size of the camellia and rhododendron trees was 20-30 feet. Maria and I decided to tackle the garden, and bring it into order. One day a week we would spend 2-3 hours, pruning and trimming and weeding. I enjoy gardening, and I suppose I was full of helpful hints. We talked as we worked, and shared our lunch. A big apple tree and a lemon tree needed the chainsaw. John and I tackled that one Saturday morning. They were lovely late summer days, and a pleasure to be working outside.

When our gardening was at an end, we decided to sew one day a week. It was good for me. I hadn't done much sewing for quite some time. After John and Maria's baby was born, changes came. We would go for a walk, taking the pram, if we didn't find the time to sew. Eventually, when Maria had two children we would just have morning tea together weekly, at their place or ours. Of course we shared meals regularly. We also had a monthly Bible Study together, which was attended by another friend as well.

We did not do lots of talking on the phone, and arrangements were flexible. We talked of cooking homemaking, marriage, families, faith, and scriptural insights, pot plants and bringing up children. I think mostly I told Maria of my experiences with our children, and life situations.

We shared books that had blessed us, and occasionally I would share a relevant Table Talk devotion page, which my husband used to copy from the computer for me.

The time came when John and Maria planned to move to a new job, closer to the church, and other young families, with children the age of theirs. While we could see this was a good move, and for their benefit, it did leave a gap for a time.

We do not write to each other often. Maria's life is full with three young children. They come and stay with us sometimes. It is a real pleasure. We are comfortable with each other.

I had not heard of the term Spiritual Mothering. My desire was to be help and a friend. I was blessed by the relationship, and warmed by the way Maria and I got along.

I have to confess that I never set out to teach her anything in particular, but we both appreciated good ideas, and in that sense, we were both learning continually.

Our husbands were ready to share the friendship in every way. We were doubly blessed.

The other story

And this is what the younger woman, "Maria", writes: "I was 21 and newly married when we moved to the small country town. The friendship between Kathryn (an older woman) and myself was unique because our two families were the only country members of the Reformed Church in the area. The friendship between our husbands

was also genuine. They indulged in games of table tennis when possible and for a period of time we met together for 'home church' and bible study.

Kathryn had time to give and she was generous too. She would always bring flowers from her garden or newly grown produce (eg. silver-beet and feijoas) when she visited. I was adjusting to married life and a new town and early on, Kathryn suggested that we tackle my "new" rented garden together (with it's seven years of overgrowth). This was something I never would have gotten around to on my own. I learnt a lot about pruning and the names of various plants and trees. It was rewarding to literally see the fruit of our work. Another time, Kathryn saw a laden apple tree in my garden and offered to help me preserve the fruit. She came over with some equipment and taught me how to do it from the start to the finished product. Prior to the birth of my first child, Kathryn and I spent more time together. She helped me to see God's wonderful creation in my own backyard and because she enjoyed it so much, it rubbed off on me.

As I followed her example, I picked up how to present a simple dinner beautifully, how to decorate a table, and how to make a pavlova. It's only now, looking back, that I can say what I have learnt from her; at the time we were 'just friends getting together'. While we were busy with ordinary things and doing something with our hands, conversation naturally flowed. Books were recommended and discussed; from light-hearted,

humorous fictional stories to biographies and Christian living. Current events, letters to the editor and the Christian response/perspective were also discussed. Time was spent at their house, watching her and talking while she prepared dinner or made bread. We also agreed to meet weekly for sewing. It was lovely to have someone to do it with and I think it was a benefit to us both. Kathryn was able to get some mending done and I made things (maternity outfits, a tri-pillow, and a book cover) in a short time with an experienced sewer and friendly companion nearby.

After the baby was born, Kathryn helped with meals and practical support. The first time she visited, she showed me how to make up the bassinette and how to wrap my baby in the muslin wraps she had

given me. My 'made up' approach wasn't working and I was grateful for this education! I didn't see as much of her as before because the church situation changed and I was busy with my little one. We now went for walks instead of sewing and if we hadn't seen each other recently, she would call to see how I was getting along. What was particularly special was her memories of how it had been when she was a mother with young children. I enjoyed listening to her life experience, what had worked for her and the knowledge that she'd been busy like me too! It was told as a memory/story so it was neither offensive nor judgmental. My mother can't remember many details of my childhood and I can well understand this (I'm having problems remembering what I've done for my own children!). This is probably why Kathryn's memories were such a blessing.

The Scriptures and the love of our God fell neatly and casually into conversation. I was stimulated by her faith and example. We were walking one day (pregnant with my second child by this stage) and I remarked that I felt quite vulnerable when I was home alone, and my husband was working late. She reminded me of the verse in Isaiah 40:11 of how He gathers the lambs with His arm and gently leads those that are with young. I have remembered it ever since and it was a comfort to me. She was also empathetic when my children wouldn't sleep and we were visiting there for the evening. "Children are often unsettled when they go out" she'd say. It was reassuring and I knew she really didn't mind that it was like that or that my children spat up a little on her carpet or made a mess.

I can see that she loves her husband and loves doing what she is doing – serving in the place God has put her and because of this, she taught me what was good (probably without even meaning to!) She taught me to appreciate beauty in pretty things and how to make a home. Our family has moved away now, but I look back to the time I had with her with fondness. She looked after me well and showed me how to serve with a willing heart.

Simple and natural

So, do you see how simple and natural, and how truly fitting in our local New Zealand setting such a friendship can be? But, equally, how true to the timeless truths of gospel-living as Jesus and Paul both taught them in Scripture? This is how we pass on the faith to the next generation, and all those generations to come. Does it matter if we don't have children of our own? Does it matter if we made a few mistakes ourselves? Not at all. God will use whatever lessons He has taught us, in whatever our calling in life may have been, in the life of someone younger in the faith, if we are only willing and available. Are we?

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Between You and Me!

May days 1940

Dick Vanderpyl

Of recent times New York has experienced what it is like to be attacked without warning. Most people here in New Zealand have had no experience of such a happening but those of our "oldies" who were living in the Netherlands in 1940-45 remember vividly what such happenings were like and the New York bombings bring it all back to mind.

The Dutch had not been involved in a war since Napoleon occupied the Low Lands around the turn of the 17th century into the 18th. That winter the Netherlands suffered one of the worst freezes of the large rivers, the Rhine, the Waal and others. Hence the Dutch could hardly defend their country, when in that winter of 1795 the French crossed the rivers on foot. The Royal family only just managed to escape to England.

Then in World War One we narrowly escaped involvement when the Germans decided to bypass us but surprised the Belgians by bypassing the impregnable Maginot Line, a line of fortifications extending along the eastern borders to defend France from a German attack. It was a cunning trick on their chessboard!

With the Dutch having had no experience of war for almost two centuries, the government and the population had no inkling of what a term of occupancy by our German neighbours would be like. All we had was a small army with outdated rifles, antiquated tanks and a few fighter planes. The Netherlands never anticipated an occupation by any of their neighbours, lasting five long years of suffering and starvation.

Prior to World War Two an anti-war group, the "Broken Rifle" Movement, formed to urge the nation not to be involved in a possible war. The supporters of that movement carried a small metal badge of a broken rifle on their reefer jackets. With hindsight, just think what we could have done without that type of mentality, refusing to defend their country!

At war!

And then totally unexpectedly, we were at war! It was the 10th of May, the last month of Spring. Daylight came around between three and four o'clock. We lived close to The Hague in Rijswijk (Ryswyk) in a three-storey house with a flat roof. Suddenly we were woken up with the noise of a large number of planes over our town; we hung out of our windows and saw hundreds and hundreds of parachutists come sailing down. From our roof we could see the military airport about 700-800 metres from where we lived. It was awesome! Never had we experienced anything like it; it was the first time that a nation used parachutists. It had been a closely kept secret by

our neighbouring country! Quickly we turned on the radio and heard the news that we were at war with Germany. I was 14 years old then! We youngsters were quite excited about it, even more so because all schools had closed their doors! The battle for our nearby airport changed hands several times. Many on both sides lost their lives. We saw trucks and motorbikes with sidecars full of wounded soldiers, blood streaming from their faces, passing through our streets.

Initially we had no feeling of anger or hatred that came later during the occupation. It happened too quickly to absorb.

Our soldiers – totally inexperienced – stood firm and managed to recapture the airport and surroundings on several occasions. But in the end, there was no hope of overpowering the enemy.

A fierce resistance

By May the 14th, the German elite crack troops had lost too many lives, quite apart from around 1600 men who were imprisoned, of which 1200 of them were shipped in haste to England and remained there for the duration of the war.

The German Headquarters were convinced that with their Blitzkrieg - intensive campaign – they could easily occupy the Netherlands in a day or two.

They realised that one more day would be too much for them! So they decided to bombard the centre of Rotterdam. From our roof, we could see black smoke rise in the sky; burned paper from offices floated about 15-20 kms through the air; they also bombed the oil-tanks near Rotterdam and a huge pall of black smoke came over us. Thousands of people fled to the neighbouring villages and townships to be cared for!

But then on the fifth day news came over the radio that we had capitulated to prevent further bombing, such as the centre of The Hague! Our Royal family and the Ministers of the Crown barely escaped to England to continue their duties.

I vividly remember the fear and angst of "what will happen now!" The nation felt strongly that we had lost our "mother" Queen Wilhelmina. At first there was a feeling of anger and betrayal, but as time went on we realised that this decision had been the right thing to do! Our own "Radio Oranje" was set up in London, encouraging us with up-to-date news. Secretly we listened at specific times to be updated on what was going on. Of course the Germans realised this was happening and we were forced to hand over our radios. Many did not and hid them in secret places to get the latest news, which was speedily shared with neighbours and others!

For the adults – parents and others - there came a time of worry and fear as the enemy held unexpected razzias (round-ups) to imprison men from the age of 16 to be taken to Germany to work in armament factories and so free their own men for their army. Many went into hiding, staying

in their homes and going into well prepared hiding places and hiding their family photos when areas were cordoned off and German soldiers searched through the place. My hiding place was at our neighbour's place. We crawled through a hole in the floor under the dining table where there was only a toilet-pan and some candles.

Five brief days we were at war and five long years we had to wait to be liberated from the occupying unwelcome forces!

Half a century has gone by, with rumours of war and hot spots in many places!

Though God has called us to peace (1 Cor. 7:15), the writer of Ecclesiastes in chapter 3:8 admits, "there is a time for war and there is a time for peace."

By now two generations in the Western World have been spared a holocaust (i.e., slaughter). So therefore let us follow the advice of the Apostle Paul who urges to pursue the things, which make for peace and the building up of one another. (Rom. 14:19).

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Hinduism - gods, gods and more gods

A look at a religion settling in our country

Diana Moes VandeHoef

In a walled compound in the temple Kalighat in India, a large assembly of Hindu women begins to loudly wail in high-pitched voices. Bare-chested men shout, "Jai Kali! Jai Kali!" ("Kali lives! Kali lives!"). Before them lies the decapitated body of a longhaired black ram hanging limply from a forked wooden stake. The goat's head has been placed in a silver dish to be taken into the inner chambers of the temple and offered to the goddess. Later the body will be cooked and the flesh eaten by the worshippers as *prashad*, food that has been blessed by a deity.

A scary religion

Kali is the wife of *Shiva* (the universe destroyer and one of the three principal gods in modern Hinduism). Like her husband, Kali is considered a ferocious, over-zealous deity who often destroys life in an effort to annihilate evil. She is frequently portrayed as an ugly crone with a huge bosom, large hanging tongue and a string of human skulls around her neck. In her many hands she holds numerous weapons and the bloody head of a demon.

The image of Kali is hideous and intimidating, but for some unexplainable reason, her followers

and fear for their souls. God has repeatedly warned against worshipping idols and consuming food sacrificed to graven images. To do so is to deny the one true God of the Bible and enter into eternal death.

The goddess Kali is just one of several million gods and goddesses revered in the Hindu religion. Since there are so many deities, there are also many varied methods of worshipping. Hinduism is complex, constantly changing collection of beliefs and practices that has managed to incorporate aspects of many different religions, including Christianity.

Scientists and historians believe Hinduism began during pre-historic times. Statues discovered in archaeological excavations in the Punjab and Indus valleys (in modern Pakistan) show the early civilizations worshipped idols similar to some gods and goddesses worshipped by Hindus today.

Caste system

Sometime around 2000 BC the inhabitants of the Indus valleys were conquered by the Aryans, a nomadic warrior clan probably from southern

tradespeople. The lowest caste is the *Shudra* who include servants and unskilled laborers.

Outside the caste system are the outcastes. They perform the most menial, dirty tasks. In the original caste system instituted by the Aryans, outcastes were also untouchables. They were considered unclean and the higher castes were not permitted to make contact with them. Untouchability was legally abolished in India during the 1940s, but outcastes still exist and often live miserable lives in modern India.

For the first few centuries after the caste system was instituted, upward mobility was possible through marriage or accomplishments. This intermarriage caused a blending of the Indus aboriginal and Aryan religious beliefs. Around 800 BC a collection of writings was composed which incorporated both culture's religious beliefs. These writings became known as the *Vedas*, one of the Hindu scriptures still used today. The *Vedas*, whose content continued to change up until the 16th century, consist of procedures for ceremonial rites, prayers, teachings and a description of the caste system.

Unlike the early caste system, there is rarely upward movement among the modern caste system. Or to be more specific, there is rarely upward movement during an individual's lifetime. A Hindu can hope to become a member of a higher caste through reincarnation if he or she has lived a good life and fulfilled all of his or her duty (*dharma*) in the previous life.

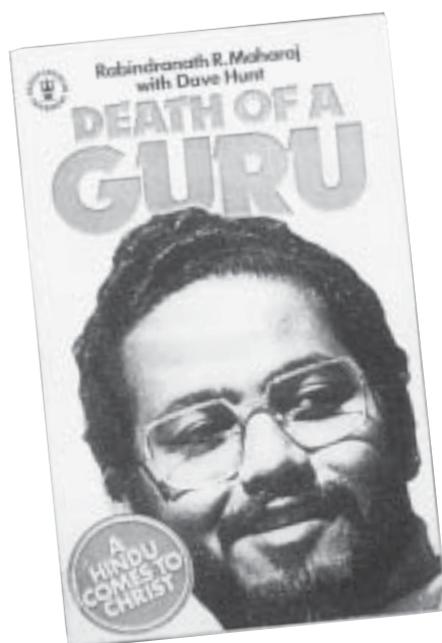
A still evolving religion

Religious harmony existed for several years after the Aryan invasion. Then around 600 BC many of the previously accepted truths of early Hinduism were beginning to be questioned. This resulted in the formation of several breakaway sects, one of the better-known ones being Buddhism. By the third century BC Buddhism became India's state religion.

The new and popular religion of Buddhism had a big influence on the development of the dying Hindu religion. It wasn't long before Hinduism, in an attempt to attract followers, copied the way Buddhism used art, parables, stories and songs for religious instruction. Buddhism's influence can be seen in the *Bhagavad Gita*, another Hindu scripture created between 500 BC to 100 BC. The *Bhagavad Gita* teaches lessons about duty through a conversation between warrior-prince Arjuna and his charioteer, Krishna.

Krishna is an incarnation of *Vishnu*, preserver of the universe and the second main Hindu deity. (The final principal Hindu deity is *Brahma* or *Ishvara*, the creator of the universe.)

By 1000 AD interest in Hinduism was regenerated, encouraged by the use of military force by Hindu rulers to suppress Buddhism.



Russia and the Baltic. The Aryans brought with them their own culture and religion, and instituted the caste system. In this caste system, Aryans were almost always in the upper classes while the indigenous peoples remained at the bottom.

The early caste system is much like the modern one. Starting at the top are the *Brahmin* who are priests, philosophers, holy men and scholars. Next is the *Kshatriya* class who were originally warrior-rulers, but today include politicians, civil authorities and all the administrative people whom run the country. Below this class are the *Vaishya* who are

consider her a beautiful provider who fulfills the lives of all her devotees. Her supporters, many of whom most likely follow the Hindu doctrine of non-injury to living things – *ahimsa* – are willing to put aside this belief to show their reverence to an idol that can neither hear them nor help them.

As a Christian, it is difficult not to pity them

The existence of Hinduism was once again threatened during the Mohammedan expansion. Around the 11th and 12th centuries Muslims sought to overpower Hindu territories (and in later years conquer Christianity) in order to assert Islam. The Muslims succeeded in their mission, but only in what are modern-day Pakistan, Bangladesh and Kashmir. These areas became Muslim, while Hinduism in India adapted and flourished.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Hinduism went through a period referred to as the Hindu Revivalism. During this time Christians from Europe were sending missionaries to evangelize to the Hindus. It would appear that the Holy Spirit worked in the hearts of many of those Hindus. Large numbers were converted, resulting in a loss of Hindu followers. In response to the loss of worshippers, Hindu leaders reformed many Hinduism practices, assimilating some Christian beliefs such as our belief in a one, all-knowing God and, by some groups, the concept of grace.

But the Hindu concepts of God and grace are twisted. To the Hindu, grace requires forgiveness but no atonement for sins. Hindus don't acknowledge sin, but believe all the suffering in the world is a result of bad actions, referred to as bad karma. In Hindu grace, it is unclear who offers the forgiveness and why it would be necessary since sin doesn't exist.

One god manifesting as many gods

The Hindu's one, great god is referred to as the Absolute Reality or Brahman. Brahman is a formless, supreme, permanent, never changing force that humans cannot completely understand. This description could be used to define the only true God of the Bible, but the similarity goes no further.

Brahman in its great wisdom, many Hindus believe, realized that mankind would not be able to comprehend its great power. So it manifested itself in gods and goddesses that would cater to each individual's needs. These gods and goddesses, and their incarnations, manifest a small portion of their "cosmic energy" in images, sculptures, vessels, prints or elements in nature all over the world.

Hindus worship these manifestations in festivals, pilgrimages and ceremonies (*pujas*). The goal of these methods of worship is to pay respect to and make contact with one or more deities. This contact is referred to as *darshan*, literally meaning, "seeing and being seen by god."

Most of these *pujas* occur in homes, temples or shrines. Since so many Hindus worship a personal god or goddess (which explains why there are millions of deities in Hinduism), it is impossible for Hinduism to be a congregational religion. Hindu priests do not compose sermons, but act as a liaison between a deity and devotee by following the guidelines in the Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita. Each deity requires a complex set of rituals to be enacted precisely in a show of respect. If the proper amount of respect is not shown to the deity, Hindus believe the punishment

is severe and may occur in the present life or in future lives.

Three ways to "salvation"

All Hindus believe in reincarnation (*samsara*) – which is also the most common Hindu belief adopted by New Agers – and their life goal is to stop the endless cycle of birth and rebirth by ultimately reaching a oneness with Brahman. This state of liberation or salvation, referred to as *moksha*, is accomplished in three ways.

The first way is through an individual's actions – *karma*. Hindus believe that every action or thought has consequences that will affect them in future lives. So the goal of all Hindus is to save themselves by overcoming the weight of bad karma through cheerfully fulfilling family and social duties and harming none.

The second way to *moksha* is through accumulating knowledge (*jnana*).

Hindus believe that each person's soul (*atman*) is Brahman and the only reason people are chained to the cycle of rebirths is because they are ignorant of this fact. This ignorance must be overcome through deep meditation to allow reabsorption into Brahman, the supreme formless force.

The last way to salvation is through devotion (*bhakti*) to a deity and experiencing *darshan*. The levels of deity devotion vary. Some Hindus give up all worldly pleasures and family relationships to live as ascetics. These ascetics live in abject poverty, without shelter and little clothing. They spend their days praying to their personal deities and gaining *jnana*.

How effectively a person fulfills these methods to *moksha* will influence the form in which he or she will be reincarnated. Sometimes a person can return in the body of an animal. For this reason Hindus consider all animals sacred. The cow, because of its giving nature, symbolically represents all animals and is venerated by Hindus in India.

Conclusion

Although the majority of Hindus are located in India, Hinduism is not as far removed from our lives as it appears to be. In Canada and the United States alone there are over 400 Hindu temples and more being built each day.

As the appeal of Hinduism increases, so does its threat to Christianity. It's a religion that constantly adapts to become what people want it to be. Each day its influence can be felt more and more, as can be seen with the New Age movement that has incorporated many Hindu beliefs.

Rick Rood of Probe Ministries says it best when he writes: "Hinduism has the potential to serve as a major vehicle for uniting much of the non-Christian world." It is a religion of acceptance, tolerating other beliefs, including Christianity, as just another method to go about worshipping the same one God.

Unfortunately, for all their devotion, Hindus do not worship the one true God, but ultimately worship themselves. Hinduism is a religion that focuses on the inner power in people, instead of the power of God. It denies the need for a savior and atonement for sins, teaching that man can save himself.

As Reformed Christians we must realize this and lovingly point out to Hindus the errors of their ways through the use of the Gospel. Then we must pray for them, keeping in mind that salvation doesn't come from our evangelical efforts. We are merely vehicles God uses to bring the truth to others. It is only through the work of the Holy Spirit that Hindus, and other non-Christians, come to know the one true God and only source of salvation.

(This article originally appeared in Reformed Perspective, www.reformedperspective.ca with whom we have a reciprocal arrangement)

World in focus

India: Gujarat – theft of religious freedom

The Gujarat Freedom of Religion Bill was passed in the Gujarat State Assembly on Wednesday 26 March.

"We will oppose this draconian law as it's against the spirit of India's constitution which allows freedom to propagate and practice any religion," said Samson Christian, a spokesman for the All India Christian Council.

Christians in Gujarat condemn the law, saying it targets their religion and will deny people freedom to practice the religion of their choice.

The Gujarat Freedom of Religion Bill is modeled on similar anti-conversion legislation adopted in the southern state of Tamil Nadu in October 2002.

The language in the Bill's 'Statement of Object and Reason' is highly provocative. It contains the usual reference to "force, allurements and fraudulent means", however, terms such as "anti-social, subversive, vested interest groups and exploiting innocent people" also demonstrate the deep contempt that proponents of *Hindutva* have for Christian workers and Christian witness.

Likewise, the Bill's suggestion that banning conversions will "enable people to practice their own religion freely" is totally misleading. The reality is that this 'Freedom of Religion Bill' will actually

rob them of their religious freedom. This is a direct violation of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion.

The Bill comes hot on the heels of a controversial survey, conducted by police, of Christians in Gujarat. Initially senior police officials denied that any such survey had taken place. However, the All India Christian Council has protested to the Gujarat General Director of Police and taken the issue to the Gujarat High Court. The Gujarat government has now admitted that the survey did take place.

According to the Gujarat government, the survey on the Christian community was undertaken in response to a parliamentary query, to seek information in connection with the proposed Anti-conversion Bill. The survey has left Christians in Gujarat feeling intimidated, harassed and very anxious about the possibility of targeted surveillance, reprisals and persecution.

In an article entitled 'Gujarat moves against religious conversions', Jill McGivering, a BBC correspondent in Dehli quotes Satish Pradhan, an MP with the right-wing pro-Hindu Shiv Sena party as saying, "For people who are poor, it's a question of their bread and butter. But while giving bread and butter and medicines, [Christians] slowly start teaching the Bible and start converting them. We object to this."

The BBC article went on to say, "Like many who support the bill, and unlike many Indian Christians, he (Pradhan) sees Christianity as a foreign religion which is trying to undermine India's Hindu culture. "Why should we keep mum?" he said. "We're proud to be Hindus."

According to the BBC article, Christian missionaries are the main target of the Bill and the Shiv Sena Party wants anti-conversion legislation to be adopted across the whole of India.

The BBC article also quotes Professor DN Pathak, the president of the non-government group, the People's Union for Civil Liberties of Gujarat. He believes that the Gujarat state government is inciting religious polarization and tension for political gain, to deflect attention from economic

and social problems. "They're side-tracking. The real issue is development, removing poverty and creating a better quality of education, health and human rights. But instead of touching these issues, the government seems to be rousing people's religious sentiment."

He pointed out that Christians constitute less than 0.5% of Gujarat's population whereas about 85% of the state are Hindus. "To feel Christians are going to increase their population and that they will be a threat to many Hindus is absolute nonsense," he said.

Some lower caste Hindus converted to Christianity or Islam, he said, as a way of having the upward mobility and social equality that Hinduism didn't offer. "That freedom," he said, "should not be touched."
+ Elizabeth Kendal, Principal Researcher and Writer for the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission "<http://www.worldangelical.org/rhc.html>"

Presbyterian Iraq

Presbyterian missionaries began working in Iraq in 1836. Some five congregations belong to the Assembly of Evangelical Presbyterian Churches-Iraq. The oldest of these congregations dates to 1840 and is located in Mosul. The National Presbyterian Church in Basra dates to 1940. Other congregations are located in Kirkuk and Baghdad.

According to tradition, in the first century the apostle Thomas evangelized the region on his way to India. An estimated 600,000 Christians live in the country of 22 million people. By far the largest group is the Chaldean Catholic Church, followed by the Assyrian Church of the East (called the Nestorians), the Syrian Orthodox Church, and the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Under the current Baath party government all Christian clergy and property are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Islamic Property. Presbyterian laymen have risen as far under the present administration as vice marshal in the military and in the ruling Baath Party.

The Baath movement derives from a 1947 founding congress in Damascus. This conclave of pan-Arab intellectuals was inspired by the ideas of two Syrians, Michel Aflaq and Salah ad Din al Bitar. Before the rise to power of Saddam Hussein the Baath movement sought to bring all Arab states together in a socialist, secular, unionist, and democratic national structure rather than an Islamic society.

After the Gulf War, independent Presbyterian and Reformed congregations in North America supplied relief aid to Iraq's Presbyterians through Christian Liberty Academy under the direction of Dr. Paul Lindstrom.
+ Christian Liberty Academy, 502 W. Euclid Ave., Arlington Heights, IL 60004

President supports abstinence education

The Bush administration's investment in abstinence education should reach a record high of about US\$120 million this year. The funding, which includes \$117 million in ongoing programs and about US\$3.5 million in one-time earmarks to specific programs, is welcomed by proponents of abstinence education.

"This is as high as it's ever been," said Heritage Foundation analyst Robert Rector. The goal, he said, remains at least US\$135 million a year, which would finally put abstinence funding on par with spending for contraceptive education. President Bush tried to reach US\$135 million by budgeting US\$73 million for one abstinence grant program. Congress funded it at US\$55 million instead.

Two veteran abstinence programs — Project Reality, based in Golf, Illinois, and the Best Friends Foundation in D.C. — received earmarks of US\$100,000 and US\$250,000, respectively. Both will use the money for programs in the District. The other US\$3.2 million of the one-time grants is going to 31 programs in Pennsylvania. [Ertelt]
+ Washington Times, 3600 New York Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20002

50th Anniversary CELEBRATION

This year the Reformed Church of Wellington celebrates 50 years since its institution in 1953. We thank the Lord for his goodness and faithfulness to our congregation over the past years.

We plan to celebrate this occasion on Saturday the 17th of May, D.V., with a luncheon to be held from 11am at the Brooklyn Function Centre.

On Sunday the 18th of May a thanksgiving service will be held at 3pm at the Congregational Church in Cambridge Tee (one of the original places of worship). Details have been sent to all churches and we look forward to meeting and enjoying fellowship with past and current members.

For more details please phone **Dirk & Helen Spoelstra** on (04) 383 7940 or email cabnine@paradise.net.nz.

Gleanings in focus

by **Andrew Reinders**

Avondale

This morning, together with Neil & Nikki Hunt and family, we joyfully celebrate the baptism of Jamie & Brianna. How wonderful that children of believing parents are seen by God as part of his holy covenant! What a sign of God's grace! As new parents, Nikki & Neil need a special measure of God's grace and mercy. May our prayers and promises, also as a congregation, be very real on this occasion.

Bishopdale

Congratulations to Marcel and Alice Vlaanderen on the birth of a baby daughter. Nina was born last Sunday evening weighing 8lbs 4oz. We rejoice in God's goodness to them and congratulate Henk and Effie on another grandchild. Alice and Nina have returned home after four days at Rangiora hospital.

Buckland's Beach

Our own shirts with our own Logo's. Due to popular demand, your Social committee has gone ahead and designed a special tee-shirt which has our church's name on the front and a very special message on the back. It is hoped that they will be on display today. We think every one should own at least one. They will be great for casual wear, for use at Holiday Club programmes, camps, etc. With the 'Jubilee Camp' in April, we anticipate that they will be all the rage. Gonny van Garderen will be able to start taking your orders today. Either see or ring her as soon as possible.

Christchurch

The Lord took home to be with Him the Rev. C. W. (Pim) Oppelaar. Our thoughts go out to the family, Mrs. Oppelaar and the children as they will miss their husband and father. Again we are reminded that the Lord is building a kingdom that as yet is beyond our vision and will become visible after death. When the Rev. P. v.d. Schaaf, our minister at that time, could not continue his ministry due to an inflammation of the vocal cords the Rev. Oppelaar was in Christchurch on furlough from Taiwan where he was called as a missionary. He did his deputation work from Christchurch. This allowed him to conduct some of the services and we remember his ministry and preaching with fondness. With many others that were intimately known to us he may now rest from his labours.

We rejoice with Mr. and Mrs. Ed and Liana Havelaar and their families as they give thanks to God for the birth of Juanita Anna.

As you know, we are hoping to begin a radio ministry in the near future. The proposed name of the program is, "Living by the Book." It is hoped that this will be a 30 minute program

broadcast once a week on PLAINS FM, 96.9 FM. The purpose of the ministry will be: (1) To help people see that the truths of the Bible have much to say to contemporary society; (2) To promote a Reformed world-and-life view in Christchurch; and (3) To regularly inform people about the worship services, programs and special events sponsored by our church. The format we hope to use will consist of such things as: messages, interviews, dialogues, special guests, recorded speeches, music, drama, etc. We need people who are interested in this ministry and willing to help out in areas of: advertising, research, program formatting, broadcasting, and follow-up work. If interested, please let one of the elders know.

In my last newsletter, I wrote that the Klazingas were striving hard to fit into a new country. I am pleased to report that the family has now been fully assimilated. Our pastor jibes his North American friends as being "hemispherically challenged," so it is clear that he is seeing things from a proper (New Zealand) perspective. His familiarity with the denomination has also grown rapidly, and has been consummated through his appointment to several synodical committees.

The days are filled with highlights at present. A few weeks ago the church was literally filled to overflowing, due partly to a large contingent of Dutch tourists who were passing through Christchurch that weekend, and partly due to the many extra visitors we had who came to witness the public profession of faith of eight of our young people – namely, Christine Alberts, Nicolas Alberts, Monique Bangma, Rebecca Bangma, Kirsten Dam, Jessica de Vries, Kirsten de Vries, and Nynke Pijpker! As one can imagine, there was rather a jubilant atmosphere that day, and many stayed to continue the celebrations over a meal – including the Dutch visitors, who can thus testify that contrary to popular belief, there is such a thing as a free lunch.

Continuing the theme of celebration, this past weekend we marked the 50th anniversary of the institution of our congregation (and hence, of the denomination as a whole). We had visitors from around the country, and around the world – including some of our founding members. The Saturday turned out to be a fine day for the picnic that had been planned. Then in the evening the church was full again for a variety evening, complete with music, speeches, and... multimedia presentations. On Sunday, there was a thanksgiving service at which members from the three Christchurch congregations as well as guests and visitors joined with us in acknowledging God's faithfulness to us.

Much was made of us being a "grandmother" church – not one with lots of grandmothers (although we have plenty), but one whose daughter (Bishopdale) has a daughter of her own

(Dovedale). This is all very true and nice of course, but it is not as though our congregation is passing away into aged forgetfulness in favour of younger, more vigorous churches. I was amused to note when I went on church visitation with our minister, that we were younger than all-bar-one of the office bearers in our "daughter" church!

We have had some comings and goings again in the last few months. Samuel de Vries has completed his studies here and departed for Auckland. On the other hand, Alan Williams has arrived from Masterton in order to commence his studies here. I mentioned our founding members earlier; one has recently returned to our congregation – and as a newly-wed, no less! We are pleased to welcome Mr Aalt and Mrs Annie Verkerk into our number. Likewise, we are also pleased to welcome Leon and Magda Swanepoel, and their daughter Lisa. The Swanepoels have come to us from South Africa.

The theme of rejoicing looks set to continue next weekend: we anticipate the wedding of Ingrid ten Hove to Stephen Condon on the Saturday, and the baptism of Juanita Anna Havelaar the following day. Yes, this time I shall forego the opportunity for self-congratulation (not to mention the publication of baby photographs!) beyond stating that Liana and I have a daughter.

But I will share with you a little tidbit I've been saving up for half a year or so, namely a peek into the mysteries of our Holiday Bible Club, which has been organised by some ladies in our congregation for quite a few years now. It is always well attended. Sixty or more children – mostly from the community – came last September. Now picture if you will the scene I walked in on one day... The room had been abandoned. Chairs were in disarray. Soft drinks and potato crisps all over the place. A cake had been three-quarters consumed, and then left. And a great tumult proceeded from beyond the opposite door. Was this panorama of destruction left behind by the children...? No indeed! I'd arrived at the tail end of the weekly meeting of the organising committee! Now I understand the reason for the enthusiastic participation of our ladies! Quote for the month: "He that eats well and drinks well should do his duty well."

And I'll close with that. Till next time.

Ed Havelaar

Dovedale

Pastoral: Richard Maffey has been asked to help out the EPC in Ashburton with leading a service there on 2nd March. The other sessions in Christchurch have been informed of this so they are kept in the picture. This is an opportunity to build bridges with like minded brothers and sisters in keeping with a resolution at our last Synod and we are happy to help out in this way.

Worship Venue: The session and Committee of Management are still investigating alternative worship venues. If you know of a facility that you believe would be suitable for our worship services, Sunday School rooms, and/or catechism classes and cadets, please see John van Garderen.

Next Lord's day we have the privilege of having Rev. David Groenenboom, from the Redlands CRCA congregation, leading us in worship during our morning service. David is here with Rev. Geoff van Schie, editor of Trowel and Sword, for discussions with our Interchurch Relations Committee. They will be meeting with Revs. Hoyt, Flinn, Wiersma and Klazinga towards the end of this week.

Dunedin

We welcome Mr Gerard and Mrs Elly Haverland to Dunedin. Mr Haverland will lead us in worship today and next week will conduct the services in Oamaru. Late last year we received a list of readers from the three Christchurch churches who would be prepared to lead services in other parts of the presbytery, that is in our pulpits and in Nelson. That there are no less than eighteen brothers willing to help out in this way is tremendously encouraging for us and greatly appreciated. Next Sunday (D.V.) services in Dunedin will be led by Mr Jos Bosma from the Bishopdale congregation.

Lynton and Matthew Baird and Seth de Reus have reoccupied their digs at 23 James Street, North East Valley, but they have a new telephone number – 473 0990. Let's leave the poor folks who inherited their old number in peace.

Dear Pastor and congregation,

I just wanted to share what a pleasure it was to attend the morning worship service at your church [on 9 February]. It was such a joy to find likeminded believers on the totally opposite side of the world. We are members of Immanuel United Reformed Church here in DeMotte, Indiana.

When we were planning our trip to Australia and New Zealand, we knew we would be in Dunedin on a Sunday. We asked our son, who is a pastor at a P.C.A. church in Kentucky, to find a good church for us to attend. We then printed out the information from the Internet. When we arrived in Dunedin we took the shuttle bus from the ship (Port Chalmers) and a taxi to the church.

Thank you so much for your hospitality. I'm really sorry that we couldn't stay for coffee. We just made it back to the ship to grab some lunch and get on a bus to take a tour of the city of Dunedin (Olveston, botanic garden, train station, etc).

*Thank you again for a precious time of worship together and for your warm welcome. Sincerely, **Bob and Maureen Birkett***

Foxton

THE ZUIDEMA'S: We thank the Lord for answering our prayers in the positive answer from John and Trudy in accepting the call

extended to them from us, to come and be our pastor. It is expected that they will arrive in NZ on the 21st April (Easter Monday) in Hamilton. They will enjoy a short holiday while waiting for their goods to arrive. Further details will be provided as soon as they come to hand.

Hamilton

CHURCH PICNIC TODAY An invitation to the whole church family to come and join in a picnic at the Hamilton Rose Gardens. Date: TODAY, Sunday Feb 23 Time: 12:45 Where: Rose Gardens, to the right of car park, Pavilion entrance. What to bring: Picnic Lunch, Deck chairs or Rug, Sports equipment if available etc. Please come and enjoy the fellowship (If raining postponed to next week)

YAC'S YOUNG ADULT'S CAMP A camp is being organised for 18-35 year old Christian people. This camp is open to both single and married people and will be held from Friday evening 16 May to Sunday afternoon 18 May at Waihi. The aim of this camp is to spend a weekend of fellowship with other committed Christians. A price has been set for \$50.00. If this sounds like you .. please telephone Wally and Jeannette Hagoort on 07-824-3053 or email us at hagoort@extra.co.nz for an enrolment form.

Hastings

PRISON VISIT With much apprehension, all ten of us arrived at Mangaroa Prison at 8:30am sharp!, far too early according to the voice behind the traffic boom. Anne de Vries prayed with us in the car park. We also talked to Trevor Old, the Prison Chaplain who guided us inside. To most of us it was a bit of an eye opener. For whatever reason we sat outside in the court yard of the block we visited. To our delight and surprise, we were joined by 9 inmates. After the introduction we started by singing 2 hymns, ably led by Esther on the guitar. Harry then opened with prayer. Jaap did the Bible reading which was followed by another song. A short message entitled 'Who Am I?' was then given. 'Amazing Grace' and 'Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah' were the closing hymns. Harry displayed some tracts and today booklets which were quite popular. Mike then closed with prayer. Our next meeting will be held DV on the 23rd of March. We were overwhelmed by God's goodness for this remarkable meeting and God's strength and blessing. Congregation, pray for this new evangelistic venture in the times ahead. – Dick Nieuwland.

Mangere

We have been shocked this past week by the news that Br Kees de Jong quite suddenly passed away. Before last weekend he had a major heart attack, masked by his diabetes. On Tuesday his health declined drastically so that he needed to be admitted to Middlemore Hospital and soon after that he went to Greenlane Hospital for emergency surgery. On

Wednesday he left this life to join his Lord and Saviour. Yesterday afternoon we had the burial ceremony and the thanksgiving service. We very much lay before our Heavenly Father our Sr Nel, the children and grandchildren, and also the friends. He was so well for so long and now he has gone, and you are and you will be missing him a lot – as we all will.

Palmerston North

EVENING SERVICE TIME Session announces that it has decided, after considering submissions from the congregation, that the evening service times will go to the new time of 4.30 pm.

Gardening One of the Cadet & Calvinette cadres would like to serve the church community by way of tidying up/creating an attractive garden at the entrance to the church building. However to do this, we appeal to the congregation for donations of plants (ie shrubs - flowering & non flowering), top soil, bark etc. Please telephone Lynnette on 353-6868 to arrange pick-up or for any further information. All donations gratefully accepted.

Pukekohe

PASTORAL: Today we welcome Rev Michael Flinn into our pulpit. He graciously offered his services since he was up in Auckland to officiate at Rob and Seae's wedding.

Wainuiomata

We rejoice and give thanks to God with Ron & Wendy Haverland on the early and safe arrival of Emilie Johanna at 3.15am on Saturday morning, weighing 7lb 6oz.

Wellington

A huge congratulations to Bert and Rebecca and a big welcome to James Hendrik Borger who was born at 4.12am on Tuesday morning weighing 6lb,10oz. We all look forward to meeting you in person James, and praise God for bringing you into this world safely. May the Lord bless you as you grow.

We were all shocked by the sudden passing away of John Borger, following a heart-attack. May the Lord be with his wife, children, grandchildren, and wider family.

**SHORT REPORT OF
AUCKLAND
PRESBYTERY
7 MARCH, 2003**

The meeting was opened by br John van Wichen of North Shore, the calling church.

After the singing of #426 in the Psalter Hymnal, the reading of Psalm 46 and prayer, the meeting was handed over to the Rev Sjikr Bajema, the chairman for the evening. Credentials were received, a special word of welcome was extended to the Rev Dirk Wynja.

Br Wynja is a retired minister of the OPC and is filling in for the Rev John Rogers who is currently enjoying long service leave.

The minutes of the meeting held on November 29, 2002 were approved. The questions from Church Order Article 47 were answered by the delegates of Hamilton, Hukanui and Mangere. Hamilton requested prayer for the young people of the church. Hukanui gave thanks for new families and for a couple who have made themselves available for mission work in Papua New Guinea. Mangere expressed thanks for new members and for the faithfulness of the young people. There was also a request for prayer for new members.

Correspondence was ratified and dealt with. Br van Garderen reported on minutes from other Presbyteries.

North Shore was asked to discuss their appeal with Presbytery before proceeding any further.

The Colloquium Doctum for the Rev John Terhorst is set for Friday May 2, 2003 at Avondale, commencing at 7.30pm. Subjects for discussion were allocated as follows: Confessions and Subscription to W Wiersma, Word and Spirit to S Bajema, Women in Office to R Noppers, Issues in the church and world to D J van Garderen, Liturgy and Worship to J Haverland of Bishopdale.

Br van Garderen reported on OMB; the visit of Hans Vaatstra to PNG, the passing of the Rev Bill Oppelaar former missionary to Taiwan for our churches, the forthcoming visit of Frank van Dalen and seminars on Islam, the restructuring of FEBC the organisation with which Janice Reid is working. He also alerted the delegates to the visit of Dr Peter Jones of Westminster who will speak in Hamilton and Auckland from May 1 - 3.

A church visitation roster was adopted and the churches asked that the visits be made.

Br M de Ruiter expressed the willingness to act as Stated Clerk till the end of the year. He also offered to draft an update of Presbytery by-laws. This offer was enthusiastically accepted by the meeting.

W. Wiersma

SHORT REPORT OF THE CHRISTCHURCH PRESBYTERY

The Christchurch Presbytery met for the first meeting of the year 2003 on Friday evening, the 14th of March at the Reformed Church of Christchurch.

Rev. Jim Klazinga chaired the meeting, and opened by reading from 1 Peter 2:4-12. He noted that the Reformed Church of Christchurch was celebrating its 50th anniversary over that weekend with a church picnic, an evening down memory lane and a combined worship service for

the three Reformed Churches of Christchurch. The challenge, he said, is to make our Reformed faith known in our city and nation. This celebration should not be merely a time of looking back, but also a time of looking forward.

The Nelson congregation is running \$200 per week below their requirements. Although the churches of the Presbytery have been providing financial assistance to the Nelson congregation, they have been unable to gain any assistance from the synodical Needy Churches Fund. The Presbytery clerk was asked to write a letter to the Needy Churches Fund, requesting further clarification as to the reasons for their rejection of Nelson's application. The Nelson church was advised to prepare another application to be forwarded by the Presbytery.

Readers from the three Christchurch churches have made themselves available to assist the outlying churches of the Presbytery. Dunedin and Oamaru expressed appreciation for this provision.

The questions of Article 47 of the Church Order were answered by the delegates from Dunedin. They expressed appreciation for the sermons of their minister, Rev Hans Vaatstra, and for the availability of sermons for readers on the RCNZ website. They were thankful for a year of harmony, professions of faith, a heightened awareness of evangelism, and the development of a prison ministry. They asked that we pray for more office-bearers for both Dunedin and Oamaru, and for Hans and Lisa Vaatstra as they evaluate the possibility of going to PNG.

The Christchurch delegates also answered these questions. Their church bulletin now includes a report on various mission works in the

world. Members of the church are investigating the possibility of a radio ministry with Plains FM. They too were thankful for their minister's preaching. This year they are seeking to revitalise their district fellowship groups. They have found these groups very helpful in assimilating their visitors. They expressed gratitude for the Klazinga family having been with them for a year, and for the profession of faith of eight young people. The young people of the church are showing a keen interest in catechism. A number of visitors attend their services, and new members have joined the church over the past year. Steps are being taken to train younger members of the congregation as office-bearers. Needs for prayer include the elderly members of the church, who suffer from various health problems.

Delegates from Bishopdale highlighted matters of interest from the minutes of the other presbyteries.

Dovedale raised a question about the letter from Dunedin asking sessions to retain the membership of students in their home congregation. After some discussion, it was agreed that the location of the membership of students should be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

A church visitation schedule proposed by the Christchurch session for 2003 was adopted.

Rev. Michael Flinn reported on developments regarding the work of Janice Reid with FEBC, the difficulties experienced by Rev. and Mrs James in Uganda, and the positive response to the work of Rev. Bruce Hoyt in Burma.

Rev John Haverland

Missions in focus

SWIM Solomon Islands

No, it doesn't mean water sports, though sometimes people have asked SWIM Team members where their scuba gear is.

This mission had its origins in the "SWIM" program started in the Reformed Churches of Australia about 15 years ago. The idea was to give youth an opportunity to do a short stint in cross-cultural mission. SWIM is an acronym for Short Workshops In Mission. SWIM Teams were organised and sent to different places such as Sri Lanka, Philippines, Indonesia, Mexico etc.

The first team to go to Solomon Islands, consisting of eleven people, went in 1994, under the leadership of Machi Rietveld. In 1996, she

with her husband Kevin, returned with another team.

Solomon Islands is a close neighbour to both Australia and New Zealand. It is mainly a Melanesian culture, and largely Christian, though many people have only a nominal commitment to Christianity. During this second trip, Kevin had been invited by the Overseas Mission Board of the CRCA to determine what the real needs in the country were, and this was followed up again the following year.

The church leaders in the country expressed a great appreciation for SWIM Teams, but noted that they were probably more beneficial to the teams than to the churches they visited. The greater need by far was training for church leadership. Many churches have un(der)trained pastors. Training facilities were not all functioning well, and did not meet the demands or needs. Some churches had no formal or full time training institutions.

This need was made known to the OMB, which

in turn prepared a proposal to Synod to appoint two full time missionary personnel to the Solomon Islands – one focusing on “Word” ministry, and the other on “Deed” ministry.

Rev Kevin & Mrs Machi Rietveld were appointed to commence in 1998, with Mr Frank & Mrs Janet De Hoog appointed to commence in 2001.

So how is it all working out? What do we do there?

The work has developed into 4 areas as follows:

Base maintenance & development

This is part of Frank’s work. The churches were able to purchase some land (about 5 acres) and on it we now have 5 residential buildings and some storage containers. Frank & Janet and their 3 children live in one house, Kevin & Machi in another, a local staff couple, Andrew & Grace in a third, and a local couple working for the Bible Society live in the fourth. The last building is called the Transit House (local terminology) and is a guest house which can accommodate up to 18 people in moderate comfort with a few more on the floor when needed. We use this house for visiting SWIM teams, occasional visitors in transit, and also retreats and training programs for local groups.

We also have extensive kumara gardens, with the crops going to the Central Hospital or prison. We plan to build a workshop in which Frank can train locals in the skills of basic furniture making/building when funds become available. We are outside of Honiara, and have no access to the power supply, so we run on solar with a generator back up. Limited but adequate.

SWIM Teams

SWIM Teams have one of two main purposes. We classify them as ‘building teams’ or ‘ministry teams.’ Building teams come with the purpose of helping a community with a building project such as school, clinic, church etc, while ministry teams focus more on teaching ministry, whether to youth, children adults etc. There is no limit to the size of SWIM Teams, other than for practical purposes. We have had teams from 3 up to 18 (and one exceptional one of 30). They mainly come for 2-4 weeks, are not restricted to youth, but must be committed in their Christian faith. To date, we have had one team from NZ, who assisted a Wycliffe family in Makira Province with Scripture distribution. We would welcome more teams from NZ. All teams are expected to be involved in some ministry.

Training & education

In this area, we assist churches with training and education, with the focus being on church leadership. We have developed workshops or seminars on Preaching, Counselling, Marriage & Family, Leadership, Pastoral Care, as well as various theological subjects. This is the main focus of Kevin and Machi’s work, and they run courses both in Honiara, but also going out into

the Provinces because it is often more economical for them to go out than for many to come to Honiara. We have also been blessed with occasional visitors and assistance in this field. In 2001, Prof. Bill Berends assisted us with an in-service training course for the ministers and wives of the United Church of Solomon Islands.

In this ministry too, we welcome support from colleagues in the ministry who may have specialised areas of study etc.

With no Reformed or Presbyterian presence in this country, it is both a real joy and challenge to be able to present Biblical teaching to those who are starved for sound doctrine.

Diaconal assistance

The fourth and also important area is that of diaconal assistance. Solomon Islands is a third-world country. With recent civil war (euphemistically called “ethnic tension” here), and problems with good and stable governance, the economy has collapsed. And, as with all conflicts, a few have profited, but the great majority has suffered loss. The government is not able to maintain basic services of health and education, the value of the local dollar has dropped about 40% in the last 2 years causing hardships to a country that has little local industry, minimal exports, and relying on imports for most of its basic needs.

We have received great support from our churches in the supply of used clothing, hospital

and medical supplies, educational and religious books for distribution to those in need, often where we do our word ministry, thus really coupling word and deed.

We also initiated and support a school for the children in the Central hospital, and we have two part time teachers on staff there. We regular supply additional rations for the hospital and prison, particularly eggs, fruit or vegetables for which there is usually not enough money in the budget to feed patients/inmates adequately. Again, we are thankful to people and churches that make gifts available for this area of ministry.

We remain thankful to the Lord for the opportunity to serve in so many different ways, and for the many people who sponsor our work as well as ourselves in this ministry. We are in the process of developing a website: <www.solomon.crca.org.au> and we invite people to check that out too. We thank the Editor of Faith in Focus for the opportunity to contribute about our work, and we invite our brothers and sisters in New Zealand to pray for us, and if the opportunity arises, to share in our work here through SWIM Teams or means of support. We welcome any inquiries, and they can be made direct to us at email: <swim@solomon.com.sb> or mail to PO Box R196, Honiara, Solomon Islands.

With love in Christ,
Kevin & Machi Rietveld

MIF prayer notes

Pray for Jared Berends as he continues his work of language-teaching in Mongolia. Jared’s mother, Colleen, reports that he was approached by World Vision regarding the possibility of Jared doing some work with street-children. Pray also for wisdom and strength in Jared’s involvement with local churches and youth groups.

Stephen and Dorinda ‘t Hart need our prayers as they continue in their ministry in Papua New Guinea. Ask the Lord for health, strength and joy as they serve the local church in Ekor. Also ask for patience as they eagerly await more news about the involvement of people from our own churches who may serve with them in PNG.

Hans and Lisa Vaatstra are thankful for their trip to Papua New Guinea and for the prayers of people in the churches while they were there. They’re especially grateful to Dunedin session for allowing them to make the trip. Hans and Lisa are optimistic about the possibility of serving as missionaries in PNG, and would be grateful for your continued prayers as they seek God’s will for the future. Look for a report on their trip in next month’s Missions in Focus!

Walter and Jeannette Hagoort have also indicated their interest in serving as missionaries in Papua

New Guinea. There have been discussions about them taking up a position as managers of a Christian Guest House in Mapang, a suburb of Port Moresby. As well as the strategic benefit of this work, Walter and Jeannette would have an opportunity to help the Reformed church in Moresby in many different ways. Pray for wisdom and sensitivity to God’s leading as Hukanui session, the OMB and the Hagoorts consider this matter.

Janice Reid faces changes in her ministry with FEBC. Reduced donations from the Christian public (mainly in the States) have made it impossible for FEBC to supply funding for any of the international services now provided, except that of frequency management (funded by Hong Kong office). This means that, while Janice is able to continue her work with FEBC, there is no budget available with which to conduct training or develop resources. Please pray for Hamilton church, the OMB and Janice as they discuss options for the future.

The Overseas Mission Board is grateful for your prayers. Special thanks for answered prayer for more missionary commitment by our churches! Please pray for wisdom for sessions and for the OMB as they give attention to many aspects that

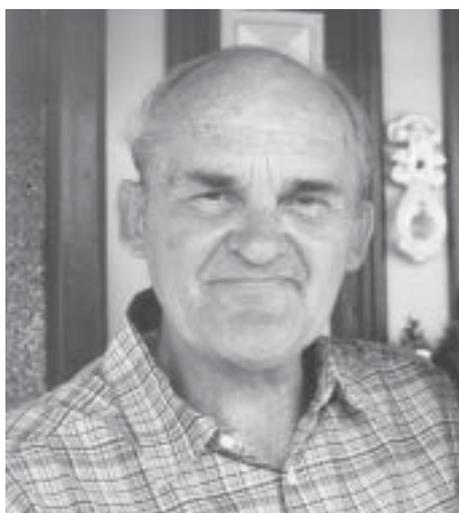
need consideration before new missionaries can go to the field and take up their ministries in the name of our churches—and of our gracious Lord, to Whom belongs the harvest.

Frank Van Dalen continues his travels and meetings in New Zealand. Please pray for safe travel, for productive meetings in many of our churches and for a greater awareness of mission

issues as a result of his visit, so that we can pray more effectively for our suffering brothers and sisters in Christ in countries where persecution abounds.

Obituary

Rev. Bill Oppelaar



The Rev C W Oppelaar was translated from the frailty of this life to the presence of his glorious risen Saviour and Lord on 26th February 2003 AD. His last few years were plagued by a severe anxiety disorder and then in the last few weeks by diagnosed cancer of the throat and stomach. He died in his 70th year.

If we should think of the Reformed Churches of NZ being made up of three generations then the youngest of these may be unfamiliar with the name. For the two older generations the name Bill Oppelaar and that of his family would have been well known in every home. This was because he became the first ordained and full-time missionary to be employed by and serve our Churches on foreign soil. He served the RCNZ for 12 years in all.

Early days

I first met Pim, as he was then known, in 1957 when he was a theological student in the senior class at the RTC. His childhood days had been spent in Indonesia, where, at the close of the 2nd World War, with the family, he was in a concentration camp. After liberation, at 12 years of age he returned to Holland with his mother and sisters where his formal teenage education was gained. At 21 he emigrated to Australia to

begin a new life. His first job in his new country was as a jackaroo. He enrolled for the theological course out of a desire to serve in the Lord's Army. From memory he was a competent student and successful at least if judged not only by assignment and exam passes but also by eventually marrying one of the Professor's daughters. Yes, Jeanne was a Schep.

First term for the RCNZ in Taiwan (Formosa)

April 1961 Bill was ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament and served the Reformed Church of Harvey, Collie and District in Western Australia. In 1962 the Synod of the RCNZ made a momentous decision to launch a mission work in Formosa. This was at a time when many of the local congregations still did not have their own church building, manse, nor even minister. The Oppelaars offered themselves for this work, into which Bill was duly installed as a missionary of the Reformed Churches of NZ. The family Oppelaar, numbering four persons, landed at Port Keelung, Formosa on 15th September 1963. Bill's first task was the two-year intense study of the Mandarin language and characters. Progressively Bill and Jeanne interacted with the people and the work developed.

After five years they returned to NZ on furlough to report in person to the Overseas Mission Board and do deputation work. Meanwhile an aggressive Mainland China was acting belligerently towards the island Republic of China as Formosa was then known. Some thought the RoC was overworked by Christian Missions. Our nearest Sister Church, the RCA, meanwhile, was engaging in work in Indonesia, the country where Bill had spent formative years. When he raised with his Board the question of giving so much attention to that island nation and suggested a change of mission focus to Indonesia, differences of firmly held opinion arose between the OMB and their missionary, which in time led to Bill's resignation.

Following the mission service Bill filled two successive interim-pastorate positions, then as minister at Brunswick Junction WA and later at Toowoomba Qld. During the period 1968 to 1977 RCNZ had found no one to continue the work in Taiwan. Over those years the Oppelaars had continued to pray that they might be able to return to continue a work with a people they had come to love. In 1976 Bill wrote to the OMB seeking reconciliation and offering again his services. Recommissioning took place on 21st August

1977 and, travelling now by air, they arrived in Taiwan on 29th August.

Second term in Taiwan

This tour of duty was in associate membership with the Orthodox Presbyterian Mission Council in Taiwan. Once more the RCNZ had a missionary family on the field. Bill's peers in the work of missions testified to his gift in the sphere of evangelism.

In 1983 they returned to Taiwan for another term of service with every promise of a fruitful period, this time in association with Christian Reformed World Missions. One aspect of his work was as assistant-chaplain to the Rev Stephen Feng, resident chaplain at Christ College. Stephen had earlier been recommended by Bill for study at the RTC in Geelong and been supported by the RCNZ. Reports on the work in 1984 tell of 29 students at one time being baptised as new believers in Christ and at another time the same year 30 more candidates.

Family separation

However by this time the Oppelaars had seven children, four of whom remained in NZ or Australia for educational purposes at the time of their return to Taiwan. As with many missionary families, the dilemma posed in the home by family separation led to the family being withdrawn in late May 1984, only 16 months into their intended final four-year term. This ended Bill's service under the OMB.

Subsequent ministry was served in the Reformed Churches of Australia (now CRCA), five years in Elizabeth SA, a short term in Manjimup WA, and part-time on the Gold Coast of Queensland. Emeritation came in May 1997. As with all the Lord's servants, Bill had his strengths and his weaknesses. Over the years some of his service for his Master was clouded by problems of which some were probably associated with Bill's deteriorating health. The OMB of the day considered that Bill's best performance was in an interactive team context.

For the life and service of Bill Oppelaar may the glory be given to our triune God.

Carl Larsen

From the DA's Office ...

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This month the Reformed Church Wellington is the third Reformed Church in New Zealand to be celebrating 50 years of existence. One of the special guests at their institution was the Dutch Ambassador to New Zealand. Many of the foundation members of Wellington were single men and women, and so in the early years there were numerous weddings. The first wedding to be held was the month after institution, on 26th June 1953. It was a double wedding – next month the two couples will be celebrating (DV) 50 years of marriage. The two couples were Ben and Willy Meinders and Arie and Jeanette de Vries. For the record, Arie and Jeanette said their wedding vows first, decided by alphabetical order. Although interestingly, if they were still in Holland 'alphabetical order' would have had them the other way round, since in Holland there are so many 'de' and 'van's that these are ignored when putting surnames in order.

The photo below was taken at that wedding. While many of them are still a part of God's family in the Reformed Churches in New Zealand, none of them are still in the Wellington congregation.

Those in the photo are:

Kneeling In Front (left to right): John van Laar; Jean de Vries; Joop Huizinga; Grietje Dykstra (now Huizinga).

Standing Front Row: Hilje Dykstra (now Reitsma); Willy Meinders (the bride); Rev E. Dykstra; Jeanette de Vries (the other bride); Arie de Vries (bridegroom)

Standing behind: Wim Vasan; Ben Meinders (bridegroom); Bert Braaksma; Anno Roggema; Harmen Dykstra (obscured).

