

Editorial

This month we begin a new year, a new century and a new millennium. It seems appropriate that such a significant month should see the launch of this magazine. A few of you responded to the Pilot Issue and, though we fell far short of our hoped-for target, we have decided to go ahead with production for an initial year to see whether interest will increase to the point where ongoing publication is viable.

In this issue

It is natural that Christians should be concerned for the spread of the Gospel in the country in which they live. For some this is easier than for others. Many factors influence the ease with which the believer is able to share the Faith. In a country like New Zealand one major problem can be our understanding (or lack of understanding) of the culture. John Haverland asks, "Is New Zealand a Christian country?" Perhaps we have taken for granted that the people we talk to will have some knowledge of the Bible and the Christian faith, but is this the case? and does our lack of 'success' in reaching the lost reflect the fact that we've assumed too much background knowledge?

Chris Good takes a look at some material that may help to make evangelism more relevant in our technological age. While we would not wish to replace the pulpit with a video, it is important that we examine and utilise every legitimate means of spreading the Gospel. There are many who are unwilling, unable or unready to enter a church service and these resources could be a useful way of sharing the truth with them, especially if they are biblically illiterate.

One of the great privileges of salvation is our adoption into the family of God, yet it is a theme we rarely hear expounded. In this issue we explore the topic briefly, skimming the surface of a subject which ought really to be given far more space than we can in this magazine.

In the broader church there is a common idea that Christians should be 'healthy and wealthy', or, at least, not suffering. The children are introduced to the fact that Christians should expect to suffer for the Lord, but in the midst of our suffering He gives peace. This knowledge should help young Christians to accept suffering for righteousness' sake and not automatically interpret it as evidence they are not really saved or that God is angry with them.

If this magazine is a blessing to you please tell others about it and encourage them to subscribe - or you could even purchase a gift subscription for them!

A word of testimony to Jesus

GARY BRADY

I was born in 1959 and grew up on a housing estate in South Wales. From my earliest years I knew the name 'Jesus'. I now know that not everyone refers to him that way. Some say Iesou or Iesu, others Isha or Yeshua, but to me he was always 'Jesus'.

Early vague impressions

My earliest impressions were all positive but were unhelpfully embodied in traditional pictures of Jesus as a bearded young man in a long white gown. Our local chapel had a graveyard and one of the more flamboyant Victorian graves boasted a statue of an 'angel' (i.e. a winged young hermaphrodite in a long gown). Despite the missing beard, I thought this must be a statue of Jesus (perhaps marking the site of his burial!). I think this was because from the beginning I had picked up the idea that above everything else Jesus is good. It seemed to me that anyone who was good must look good.

As I grew a little older I remember pointless arguments in my unbelieving home as to Jesus' physical appearance. I had come to the conclusion that there was no reason to suppose him to be the blue-eyed, blonde of the Sunday School pictures. I was particularly keen on the idea that he was of African appearance. I had never met anyone of a different race to my own European one but this was the 1960s and I think I came to this rather odd conclusion because I was aware of the oppression of people of colour in different parts of the world. Jesus, it seemed to me, was a man on the side of the oppressed, one who himself had been persecuted and so even if not black in reality he was at least so in spirit.

Jesus is not simply a very special man but the God-man.... By means of his Holy Spirit he comes to those who put their trust in him.

A little more research established the fact that Jesus was most likely to have been of Middle Eastern appearance. We had a beautifully tooled book at home (a Seventh Day Adventist production I later learned). It included several pictures of Jesus, still very romantic, but clearly suggesting he was Jewish.

So I came to believe that Jesus was a Jew (whatever that might mean). I believed he was a man, but no ordinary man - one who transcended racial barriers and even

human ones. Sometimes this latter perception was bolstered in rather bizarre ways. For instance, at the Sunday School we would sing a song I knew as 'Jesus bits of shine' (you may know it better as 'Jesus bids us shine'). Yes, I thought, Jesus was majestic, a 'sparkly Jesus' even. Then from somewhere else I picked up the chorus of the Negro spiritual 'Michael row the boat ashore'. When I asked my mother who Michael was she told me it was another name for Jesus. She held this view, I guess, under the influence of the Watchtower teaching that she was receiving at the time. I believe that Calvin also identified the Archangel and the Christ but most evangelicals would not accept that today. For me, even though the information was not necessarily accurate, it added to my conviction that this man Jesus was definitely someone very special indeed.

Later clear impressions

So, throughout my pre-teens, my notions of Jesus remained decidedly vague. However, in 1970 I began to sit regularly under the faithful preaching of the Word of God. The Scriptures speak first and foremost of Jesus Christ and it was through the exposition of the Word, in public and in private, that I eventually came to a clear understanding of who Jesus really is. Since about 1971 I have felt that Jesus knows me and that I know him, personally. In 1973 I sought to underline that conviction publicly by being baptised by immersion.

I now realised Jesus is not simply a very special man but the God-man. He is God, it is true, yet he is also a man. As a man he came to earth from the glory of heaven and as a man he died on the cross on behalf of sinners. Also as a glorified man he is now at the Father's right hand in heaven. By means of his Holy Spirit he comes to those who put their trust in him. I have put my whole life in his hands and I firmly believe that he lives with me and in me by his Spirit. It is a developing relationship not a static one, but from my own viewpoint I would say there are five leading characteristics in my relationship with him.

1. Jesus is my Friend. Who is your best friend? Without hesitation I have to say Jesus is mine. That can sound trite, I know, but I have no-one like him. I tell him absolutely everything. There are no secrets nor can there be. There are things I tell Jesus I would not tell my own dear wife. Not a day passes, sometimes scarcely a daylight hour, without us speaking. Often - on my best days - we are inseparable. We are always together. Life without Jesus is impossible to contemplate. It would have no meaning. I love him with all my heart. Nothing grieves me more than to let him down. The better I know him the more amazed I am that he should want to be a friend to me, but that is what he has always been.

2. Jesus is my Saviour. Of course, he is far more than a friend - he saved me. He lived and died to that all my sins could be forgiven and that I might live with him in Paradise forever. I truly believe that if I were the only sinner on earth Jesus would have died just for me and that there is no other way I could possibly have been delivered. To say I am indebted to him for everything is an understatement. Apart from Jesus I am nothing.

3. Jesus is my Shepherd. The Lord is my Shepherd. I say this because although he is my Friend and Saviour and although he lives in me, yet I still feel, within, a temptation to wander from him. It is madness, I know, but sometimes the temptation can be strong. When I do wander he gently brings me back and on my best days I am more than willing to follow wherever he leads. I am convinced this can be only for my good. Even when I pass through the darkest times I am not afraid because he is with me. Both blessing and trouble assure me of his guiding hand. He will bring me safely home. I trust him.

4. Jesus is my King. He is also my King; my Lord and Master. Whatever he commands I am willing to do. Wherever he sends I am willing to go. I honour him. I respect him. I look to him. If necessary I am willing to give up my life for his sake and for the sake of his kingdom.

5. Jesus is my God. Finally, I do not simply love and serve him. I worship him. I bow down before him not simply as my King but as my God. He is the absolute Lord of all my life. Nothing is hidden from him. He has the right to demand from me what he will and to do with me as he please. I am nothing. He is all.

This article first appeared in the December 1997 issue of *Grace Magazine* in the UK

News (continued)

- Wellington Reformed Baptist Fellowship is struggling with low numbers after an initial good start.
- many of the churches seem afflicted with an underlying apathy and discontent, in common with many other New Zealand churches.

While we ought to be thankful to the Lord for the many blessings our churches have experienced, and continue to experience, there is a great need for increased prayer, particularly for church leaders. Church members also need to recapture the vision of the local church as the place God calls us to encourage and build one another up in the Faith. We look to the Lord to help the churches to remain faithful; that they would not allow the evil one to prevail in opposing the faithful proclamation of God's Word in this land.

News

Bethel Baptist Reformed Church, Tauranga

<http://www.rbc.org.nz/directory.html#Tauranga>

Bethel is the newest of New Zealand's Reformed Baptist churches. The church has now been established for nearly 2 years (officially constituted in October 1999 with 5 members and with Andrew Kerkham as elder). Since then the church has gained 7 adherents who attend regularly. Attendances have varied from 3 to 26.

Despite its small size, Bethel is active in providing a range of regular activities including regular Sunday morning worship services, a Sunday School class for the children following the morning service, a Wednesday night prayer meeting and Church Bible Study on two Wednesday nights per month; studies in the 1689 Baptist Confession were commenced and are still in progress while a monthly Ladies' Bible Study is also held.

The preaching load has been carried by the elder and deacons, with the assistance of occasional visiting preachers. Andrew preached on Philippians, Daniel, Galatians and some of the Psalms; Trevor Keam, a deacon, preached on some of the parables, and Malachi; while Doug Murray, also a deacon, preached on James.

Trevor and Susan Keam will be shifting to Auckland in 2001 for Trevor to begin studies at Grace Theological College. Bethel will greatly miss the loss of these committed and enthusiastic members.

In addition to the regular meetings the church has been involved in a range of outreach activities, including leaflet drops and advertising to promote the church, special evangelistic meetings in August 2000, outreach at some resthomes and involvement with the Bible-in-Schools ministry in a local school.

Andrew has also had opportunity to take lectures in Theology at the Tauranga branch of the Bible College of New Zealand.

Visitors to Tauranga are encouraged to visit Bethel. If you know of people in Tauranga who may be interested in the work, feel free to contact Bethel Baptist: ph (07)544-5375; email: bbrc@xtra.co.nz

Source: Extracted from Bethel Baptist Reformed Church Annual Report (October 2000)

2000 in Review: opportunities and difficulties for New Zealand Reformed Baptists

The last year of the second millennium AD has seen some exciting new developments in Reformed Baptist Churches in New Zealand:

- the formation of the Wellington Reformed Baptist Fellowship
- a pilot issue of New Zealand's first and only Reformed Baptist magazine: *Grace & Truth Magazine*
- the first book published by Reformed Baptists in New Zealand: *Feed My Sheep* (see inside back cover)
- slow-but-steady growth in some churches (eg: Timaru and Tauranga)

However, the last year has also seen considerable difficulties:

- a number of families have left Sovereign Grace Church
- significant numbers have left North Shore Baptist Reformed Church
- Trinity Reformed Baptist Church in Hamilton has seen several families leave for various reasons
- Grace Baptist Church in Christchurch stopped Sunday evening services due to low attendances

Continued on page 4

Adoption

DAFYDD HUGHES

I have some friends who are part of a family of six children: three boys and three girls. There is nothing particularly unusual about the youngest son - he's just a natural 12 year old boy! The middle son is a little different from your average teenager: he and his three sisters were all born within minutes of each other. But it isn't just the fact that he is one of quadruplets that makes him different: unlike his younger brother, whose conception and birth were entirely natural, Peter was conceived with the help of fertility treatment. The older brother is different again: he became part of the family, not by natural birth, nor as the result of fertility treatment, but by adoption. All three boys and their three sisters are equally part of the same family; legally they are considered the same, though the three boys each became part of the family under very different circumstances.

In this article I want to explore the topic of adoption. Not adoption into the natural families with which we are all familiar, but adoption into the family of God. Adoption is an important aspect of salvation and one which has not been given much attention by theologians. It has often been overshadowed by such doctrines and justification and regeneration, with which it is closely associated.

However, as we begin considering this subject it is important to recognise that, like the family I have just described, the family of God is more complex than it may appear on the surface, and we must be careful not to confuse the different 'children' God has.

The children of God

Firstly, it must be clear that God the Son is related to the Father in a different way from all His other children. Robert Martin describes Christ as, "the Son of God *par excellence*".¹ The scriptures themselves speak of Christ as the Son of God. But here we have some confusion. Consider the following English translations of John 3:16:

The New International Version reads:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

The New King James Version reads:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

The Greek word translated variously as 'one and only' or 'only begotten' is μονογενής (monogenes); it is derived from the word μονος (monos) which you will readily recognise as meaning one or only (eg. monorail or monosyllabic). The second part of the word has traditionally been viewed as having its derivation in γενναω (gennao), meaning 'to beget'. But how can this be reconciled with the use of the word in the New Testament (eg. its use in Hebrews 11:17, since Abraham also fathered Ishmael and, later, others). More recently scholars have associated the word with γενος (genos), meaning 'kind' or 'race'. Hence, the far better translation, "unique Son of God". In this way the Scriptures distinguish Christ's Sonship from any others who might be called sons of God.

Secondly, it is important that a distinction be made between those who are children of God by creation and those who become children through adoption. In his speech

...the regenerate person is, of necessity, the child of Him who imparts new life.

on Mars Hill in Athens, Paul refers to all men as, "offspring of God" (Acts 17:29) because all receive physical life from Him. However, the Fatherhood of God in this sense is not one of relationship, whereas relationship is implicit in any consideration of the term 'adoption', whether natural or spiritual. Indeed, in contrast to this view of universal sonship the scriptures show that some are actually children of the devil: Jesus taught

that those who are not 'of God' are "of [their] father the devil" (John 8:44). There is therefore a sonship by creation which is distinct from sonship by adoption.

Thirdly, the Scriptures recognise another type of sonship. Job 1:6 is clearly a reference to the angels. This again is a sonship distinct from that of adoption.

Finally, there is the sonship by adoption which is our topic in this article.

The place of adoption in the application of salvation

Before we consider the nature of adoption, it will be helpful to spend some time examining its place in what theologians call the *ordo salutis* - "the arrangement or the order in which the various benefits of salvation in Christ are applied to the elect sinner".²

There is some debate among theologians as to the relationship between adoption and regeneration. There are particular difficulties with regard to this relationship as compared, for example, to the relationship between adoption and justification. Regeneration is the act of imparting new life to that which was previously dead;

Burhardt describes it as, “the inner renewal by the Spirit of God, which takes place when a person becomes a Christian”.³ The implication of this must be that the regenerate person is, of necessity, the child of Him who imparts new life.

John Gill argues that adoption precedes regeneration: the people “are regenerated because adopted.”⁴ However, he fails to adequately explain why God would adopt that which is dead before it was made alive. John Dagg follows Gill’s *ordo salutis*, though he is not so explicit in insisting that regeneration is the consequence of adoption.⁵

In his discussion of the *ordo salutis*, Berkhof helpfully draws attention to the different ways some terms are used by Reformed Theologians. With regard to regeneration he states:

“The word *regeneration*, which now generally designates that act of God by which He imparts the principle of the new life to man, is also used to designate the new birth or the first manifestation of the new life, and in the theology of the seventeenth century frequently occurs as synonymous with *conversion* or even *sanctification*.”⁶

In other words, regeneration can either refer to the action of the Holy Spirit giving new life, or to the time when the believer first realises and testifies to this new life.

Both Gill and Dagg use regeneration to refer to the first manifestation of the new life. Dagg states, “The production of love in the heart by the Holy Spirit, is the regeneration, the new birth,”⁷ and Gill explains, “Regeneration may be considered either more largely, and then it includes with it effectual calling, conversion, and sanctification; or more strictly, and then it designs the first principle of grace infused in the soul.”⁸ In their views of the *ordo salutis*, adoption follows justification and precedes regeneration. Whatever we may think of his *ordo salutis*, Gill’s concluding sentence is a helpful one: “Adoption gives the name of sons, and a title to the inheritance; and regeneration gives the nature of sons, and a meetness for the inheritance.”⁹

In contrast to Gill and Dagg, Berkhof’s *ordo salutis* places adoption within justification and following regeneration.¹⁰ Berkhof notes a distinction between sonship by adoption and sonship by regeneration while insisting that the two cannot be separated. He distinguishes two elements in justification. The negative element is, “the remission of sins on the ground of the atoning work of Jesus Christ.”¹¹ The positive element he splits into two parts, the first is adoption and the second is the right to eternal life. His argument is that justification is more than simply pardon. According to his interpretation of Acts 26:18, Romans 5:1-2, and Galatians 4:5, it also brings access to God and adoption as sons. However, none of these verses explicitly indicate that adoption is a part of justification, but only serve to show that both justification and adoption are grounded in the life and work of Jesus Christ. Justification is essential for

adoption, and adoption always follows justification; the two are inseparable, but nevertheless distinct. John Murray delineates the difference between adoption, regeneration and justification:

“Justification means our acceptance with God as righteous and the bestowal of the title of everlasting life. Regeneration is the renewing of our hearts after the image of God. But these blessings in themselves, however precious they are, do not indicate what is conferred by the act of adoption. By adoption the redeemed become sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty; they are introduced into and given the privileges of God’s family. Neither justification nor regeneration express precisely that.”¹²

For John Murray, regeneration is the prerequisite of adoption; he states, “God never has in his family those who are alien to its atmosphere and spirit and station.”¹³ It is therefore through regeneration that God gives His children the new nature which is required before adoption can take place. Or to put it another way: God makes them new creatures before He makes them His children.

Murray’s *ordo salutis* is the most convincing as it relates to the issue of adoption. That regeneration must precede adoption seems axiomatic, and that adoption follows after and is distinct from justification is also clear in the writing of Murray, and also James

Buchanan, who states, “This closer and more endearing relation to God, which is constituted by Adoption, is necessary, in addition to that which is included in our justification, to complete our view of our Christian privileges, and to enhance our enjoyment of them....”¹⁴

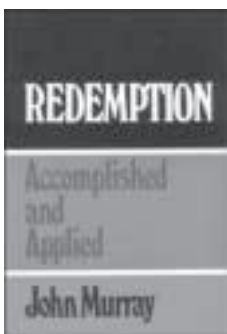
Before proceeding to consider the nature of adoption it must be emphasized that its place in the order of salvation must never be viewed as a separate and unrelated ‘step’. As Murray again states: “Though adoption is distinct

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it is never separable from justification and regeneration.”¹⁵ The *ordo salutis* is a helpful way of understanding the logical rather than the temporal or chronological progression of salvation and, as Hoeksema states, “we must remember that when the sinner is united with Christ, he receives Christ in all His fulness, and therefore principally receives all the benefits of salvation.”¹⁶

The reason we have considered the *ordo salutis* is to help emphasize the wonder of adoption. God could simply have regenerated us, giving us new life, and justified us, pronouncing us ‘not guilty’ of sin and free from its punishment - that would surely have been wonderful. But God has gone further: He has adopted the believer into His family!

The nature of adoption

The Greek word for adoption, υιοθεσια (huiiothesia), is derived from υιος (huios), meaning ‘a son,’ and θεσις (thesis), ‘a placing’. It “signifies the place and condition of a son given to one to whom it does not naturally belong”.¹⁷

Adoption is an act of grace on the part of God. He is not under obligation to adopt anyone, but has chosen to do so of His own free will. Furthermore, this adoption was planned and purposed before time began, for believers were “predestined to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (Ephesians 1:5). It is a voluntary act on the part of God the Father and does not require the will or consent of the one adopted. However, while the consent of the adoptee is not sought or required it is the fruit of the grace of God that everyone adopted into His family responds in gratitude to Him for His love.

It is important to realise that the three persons of the Godhead are all involved in adoption, though in different ways. It is specifically God the Father who adopts believers into His family. It is He who designs their adoption, He who enters into a covenant of adoption, and He who actually adopts (see, for example, 2 Corinthians 6:18, 1 John 3:1, John 20:17).

Jesus Christ, the unique Son of God, is also active in adoption. It is He who makes adoption possible through His sacrifice for our justification, which has been shown to be a necessary precursor to adoption. John shows in his Gospel that it is through accepting Christ that adoption becomes effectual when he writes, “as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13).

The Holy Spirit also has an important and distinct rôle in adoption. This is perhaps most clearly seen in His teaching and guiding work in the lives of those adopted. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, speaks of the Spirit’s work in the “sons of God” (Romans

8:14) where he also speaks of Him as the “Spirit of adoption” (v.15). Through the Spirit’s inward work in the life of the believer He gives the adopted son of God a new nature in keeping with his new status in the family of God. Murray describes it well:

“Those adopted into God’s family are given the Spirit of adoption whereby they are able to recognize their sonship and exercise the privileges which go with it... The Spirit alone could be the seal of it in our hearts... It is only as there is the conjunction of the witness of revelation and the inward witness of the Spirit in our hearts that we are able to scale this pinnacle of faith and say with filial confidence and love, Abba Father.”¹⁸

But why did God go to the lengths of adopting believers into His family? The motive must be found to rest solely in the love of God. There is nothing in the lives of the adopted that could represent them as worthy or attractive to God, for, “God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). John therefore exclaims, “Behold what manner of love the Father

has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God!” (1 John 3:1)

God could have regenerated and justified us - that would surely have been wonderful. But He has gone further: God has adopted the believer into His family!

Not only is God not stirred to adopt a man, woman, boy or girl because of any merit in them, neither is He prompted to this act of favour out of a need within Himself. As John Gill states, “God did not adopt any of the sons of men for want of a son and heir; He had one, and a higher class of sonship than creatures can be; more excellent and divine, and more suitable to the divine nature.”¹⁹

Adoption is not for God’s benefit, but for ours. This adoption, like natural adoption, is into a family; a family bearing the name of the adopter, for they are known as children of God and are given a new name. Adoption itself is a legal act, or as Murray describes it: “it is the bestowal of status, or standing...”²⁰ James Boice follows Murray and writes:

“Perhaps the words *new status* are not the best. What is really involved in adoption is *new relationships*: a new relationship to God and a new relationship to other people within the household of faith.”²¹

There are at least two important implications arising from this familial relationship. The

first is the responsibility it brings. There is a responsibility to the Father, who has adopted the son or daughter into His family. He has authority which must be obeyed, and deserves an honour which must be given. There is also a responsibility towards the family, "which requires us to love each other and work together as befits brothers and sisters".²² There is a need to look after each other both physically and spiritually.

The second important implication of adoption into the family of God is the privileges and benefits that it brings to those adopted. The provision of the Father for His family is vividly outlined by John Gill as he compares the physical provision within the natural family with the spiritual provision in the family of God: they are given an education by the Spirit of God, fed on the milk of the Word and meat for those of maturity, clothed in rich garments of righteousness and salvation, and protected by the angels of heaven.²³

John Dagg outlines a further privilege as that of discipline: the discipline of a wise and kind Father as expressed in Hebrews 12:7-11. Dagg comments, "Inestimably rich is this blessing of divine discipline... let the afflicted believer in Jesus, rejoice in the lot which God has assigned him, because it has been chosen for him by a Father who knows what is best for him, and who loves him so tenderly as to withhold from him no good thing."²⁴

Yet another and more glorious privilege and benefit of adoption is that it makes an heir to a fortune of one who had nothing of worth! Those adopted into God's family become heirs of inestimable riches, "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven..." (1 Peter 1:4).

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by Brian H Edwards

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Conclusion

Adoption is an act of God which was planned in eternity past, made effectual in time, and will be fulfilled in the future and for eternity. The grace of adoption is a sure thing, even though we may be said to be “eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23). We have assurance in the Word of God that He will give us the promised inheritance - our adoption cannot be made void: it is eternal. We may be confident of this, that He who has begun this good work in us will complete it - we have His word on it! (Philippians 1:6).

Notes:

1. S. B. Ferguson & D. F. Wright (eds), *New Dictionary of Theology*, (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1989), p.652.
2. H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1985), p.446.
3. Ferguson & Wright (eds), p.574.
4. J. Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, (Paris: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989), p.521.
5. J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, (Harrisonburg: Gano Books, 1990), p.277.
6. L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988), p.419 - see also p.469.
7. Dagg, p.278.
8. Gill, p.528.
9. Ibid, p.521.
10. Berkhof, pp.12-13, 515-516.
11. Ibid., p.514.
12. J. Murray, *Redemption - Accomplished and Applied*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1979), p.133.
13. Ibid., p.132.
14. J. Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), p.263.
15. Murray, pp.132-133.
16. Hoeksema, p.446.
17. W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, (McLean: MacDonald Publishing Co., nd), p.34.
18. Murray, pp.133-134.
19. Gill, p.521.
20. Murray, p.133.
21. J. M. Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p.443.
22. Ibid., p.520.
23. Gill, p.520. See also Boice, pp.447-448.
24. Dagg, p.276.

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Alternatives to Alpha: Evangelical Evangelistic Video Courses

CHRIS GOOD

Everywhere you go in New Zealand you see posters for it - the latest craze in Evangelism - the *Alpha Course*. So popular is the series that even those in conservative Evangelical churches sometimes feel the 'pressure' to run the course. After all, we are keen to evangelise too! However, as Reformed Baptists we have considerable reservations about Alpha, despite the fact it may have some good sessions (eg: the Trinity). The most notable concerns are: its strong charismatic emphases; inadequate outline of the gospel (only 4 of its sessions are actually evangelistic); its ecumenical tendency means that the need for justification by faith alone is not presented (hence the ready acceptance of the course by Roman Catholics), neither are the responsibilities of baptism, church membership, etc.

However, the basic evangelistic-video-and-discussion-over-a-meal format that *Alpha* utilises and that is the real key to its popularity is something that people may wish to follow. This article seeks to make people aware of two excellent series that churches or individuals may wish to use.

LIFE QUEST

Life Quest is a video series recently made by conservative evangelicals to provide a non-charismatic alternative to *Alpha*. One major benefit is that it is also a home-grown Kiwi production rather than an overseas import.

Series Format:

- Topical and apologetic
- Lectures
- Interviews
- Discussion Questions (after each session)

Physical Details: 16 sessions on 4 videos

Average Session Length: 40 minutes



Contents:

Introduction (*Optional*)

PART I: FINDING THE TRUTH (*Evangelistic*)

1. How Do We Discover Truth And Why Trust The Bible?
2. How Do We Know God Exists?
3. Is Life On Earth Created?
4. What Is God Like?
5. What Is Man's Purpose, Nature And Destiny?
6. Who Is Jesus?
7. Why Did Jesus Come?
8. How Does A Person Come Into A Right Relationship With God?

PART II: LIVING IN THE TRUTH (*Basic Discipleship*)

9. What Happens When A Person Becomes A Christian?
10. Who Is The Holy Spirit And How Can We Experience His Power?
11. How Should We Talk To God?
12. How Can We Stay Clean And Guilt Free?
13. How Can We Get The Best Out Of The Bible?
14. How Can We Grow In Intimacy With God?
15. How Can We Discover Our God-Given Abilities And God's Plan For Our Lives?
16. How Can We Share The Good News With Others?

Supplementary Materials:

- Leader's Handbook
- Participant's Handbook
- Invitation flyers and forms

Critique:

Life Quest presents the gospel along topical lines. The evangelistic/apologetic section is generally very good. Lew Meyer, the host, makes refreshing use of Kiwi humour! Occasionally a very mild Arminian emphasis slips through in appeals or invitations - but generally this is corrected by a strong biblical approach. It is certainly mild enough to be tolerated in a Reformed Baptist context. The whole section on discipleship is excellent, sound evangelical material. What the series lacks in sleek professionalism is more than made up for by the relaxed Kiwi feel to the series. The series is ideal for an evangelistic bible study or senior youth group situation, perhaps over a meal. The supplementary materials mean that minimal preparation is required and discussion questions at the end of each session can lead into discussions by participants at the end of the study or over the meal.

Cost:

Basic Video Pack (1 set videos + 1 Leaders Handbook + 1 Participants Handbook)
\$NZ100 + postage & handling.

To Order:

Life Quest Resources
PO Box 15107
New Lynn
Auckland 1232
Internet: <http://www.lifequestresources.com/>

INTRODUCING THE BIBLE

Introducing the Bible is a documentary produced by Moore Theological College and Anglican Media. It aired on Australian public television and presents the unfolding of God's plan as revealed in the bible - a plan to rescue a rebellious world. The video has an underlying reformed emphasis typical of the Sydney Evangelical Anglicans.

Series Format:

- Follows the biblical plot-line
- Narration
- Interviews
- Clips (from Jesus Video and news, etc.)

Physical Details: 13 sessions on 4 videos

Average Session Length: 30 minutes

Contents:

1. The Best-seller
2. In The Beginning
3. Promises, Promises
4. The Exodus
5. God's Country
6. The Shepherd King
7. The Rise And Fall Of The Monarchy
8. The Prophets
9. The Perfect Man

10. The Carpenter And The Cross
11. The Fisherman
12. The Persecutor
13. The Apocalypse

Supplementary Materials: none

Critique:

This is an excellent series for those who have little or no biblical knowledge. The aim is to present the bible's basic plot line - tracing the theme of the unveiling of the promised Messiah. The main disadvantage is that the videos have no accompanying outlines or discussion questions. It would be really useful for people to have material to take away with them if you want to use these videos in a group situation, so some preparation would be required. The 'documentary' style format is also quite non-threatening and suitable for lending for people to watch individually at home. The series is very professionally done.

Cost:

4 videos - AUS\$99.95 + postage & handling

To Order:

Australian Religious Film Society
(Christian Multimedia)

PO Box 97

North Ryde 2113

AUSTRALIA

Internet: <http://www.anglicanmediasydney.asn.au/tvr/videocatalogue.html>

Email: cmmedia@arfs.org.au

CONCLUSION

All Christians are responsible to share the Good News. Evangelistic videos can offer those who find this difficult a relatively non-threatening means of sharing the faith. Videos are another useful tool that we can utilise in this multimedia age where people may feel less inclined to come first-off to a Bible Study or church service. The aim however is to bring people to a growing understanding and appreciation of Christ and His Word.

Kids'
Corner

When life gets TOUGH

Dear Readers,

If you are reading this then I guess you know a little bit about Christianity. Probably you go to church each Sunday with your parents. Perhaps you are a Christian yourself - I hope so.

Have you noticed that life isn't always easy for Christians? Some people say that when you become a Christian God will take away all your problems and give you a peaceful life. It is true that God does give peace, but it is the kind of peace that often exists together with suffering and hardship. Sometimes we can lose sight of this peace because we look in the wrong places. Do you ever think you're not a good Christian because life is difficult and God must be punishing you? Think again.

What do you think about the Apostle Paul in the Bible? He was a great missionary who travelled far and wide telling people about Jesus Christ and how they could be saved from their sins. He was a faithful Christian who was followed by others as an example of how to live as a disciple of Jesus. You wouldn't think of the Apostle Paul as a bad Christian who had to be constantly punished by God. Yet Paul lived a very difficult life. This is what he told the Corinthians: "From the Jews five times I received forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (2 Corinthians 11:24-27). Does that sound like an easy life? Not at all! Yet Paul was a great Christian man who served God faithfully.

Have you ever thought about the young Israelite girl who was a slave to Naaman's wife? You can find Naaman's story in the Old Testament: 2 Kings 5:1-19. We don't know her name, but this girl clearly loved God and wanted her master to believe in God too. But her life wasn't easy. She was a slave. She had been taken from her family, perhaps after seeing her father killed by Naaman's soldiers. She was living in a strange land far from the people she knew and the



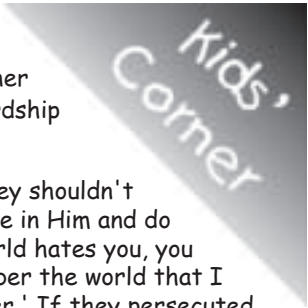
friends she loved. She had to work hard doing all sorts of chores for Naaman's wife. I'm sure you wouldn't want to be that girl. All this happened to her even though she loved God. In the middle of all this hardship she continued to love God and tell others about Him.

When Jesus was here he told His friends that they shouldn't expect to have easy lives if they continued to believe in Him and do what He told them. Here's what he said: "If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you... Remember the world that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (John 15: 18, 20). So you see that we shouldn't really expect to have easy lives as Christians. Jesus had to suffer, and we His servants must also suffer. Yet we can still have peace! The peace we have is inside us and comes from God. It comes from knowing that our sins have been forgiven because Jesus was punished in our place. It comes from trusting in God's promise that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:8). It comes from knowing that we are doing God's will and one day, when we go to heaven, we will hear Him say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:23).

I hope that you will put your trust in God too. I hope you will learn to live as a Christian even when life gets tough. Don't give up on God - He never gave up on us, but sent His beloved Son into the world to save sinners. If you trust in God then one day your suffering will come to an end and you will be with Him in paradise. You can look forward to hearing God say, "My child, I love you!"

With best wishes,

Dafydd



A graphic with a grey-to-white gradient background. The text "Kids' Corner" is written in a white, sans-serif font, slanted upwards from left to right.

Kids'
Corner

For you to do!

There are lots of people in the Bible who loved God but had tough lives. We have seen that this was true for the Apostle Paul and for the young Israelite girl who served Naaman's wife. Find out about some of the other people who suffered hardship even though they were trusting in God:

This man got into trouble because he wouldn't disobey God. He ended up in prison. Who is he? (Genesis 39:7-20)

This man became a famous soldier because God was with him. That made the king jealous and try to kill him. Who is he? (1 Samuel 18:5-11)

This man loved God but Satan said it was just because he was rich. God let Satan make him poor. Who is he? (Job 1:1-22)

These men wouldn't worship a statue instead of God so they were sent to be burned to death. Who are they? (Daniel 3:8-23)

This man told people they needed to believe in Jesus but instead they hated the man and stoned him to death. Who is he? (Acts 7:54-60)

Kids'
Corner

Grace & Truth Family Bible Conferences 2000

a report by
JASON & SVETLANA TOMKINSON

In September last year people gathered together at venues in Christchurch and Auckland for the annual Grace & Truth Family Bible Conferences. The speaker was Arturo Azurdia, the pastor-teacher at Christ Community Church in Cordelia, California.

The Christchurch conference was held on Friday 19th September. The evening was broken into two sessions. At the first session Art spoke on the uniqueness and supremacy of Christ from Hebrews 1, while in the second session he challenged us that since we have such a great Saviour we ought not to drift away from Him. He reminded us that drifting from Christ does not happen in a moment but gradually as we neglect the things of God: reading God's Word, prayer and fellowship with the other believers. Although it was a relatively small group everyone had an opportunity to meet Art and talk about the messages with others. Those who were able and made the effort to attend were greatly encouraged. It was a privilege to be there and to hear such good ministry of God's Word.

A few of us were blessed with the opportunity not only to hear Art speaking in Christchurch but to travel to the North Island to hear him again at the Auckland conference. On Friday 26th September people from different churches in Auckland and around NZ gathered to hear Art as he preached from the book of Hebrews. Immediately the Lord's people were aware that here was God's Word being presented not "in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance" (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

Throughout the three day conference (five messages) Art developed the theme of perseverance in the faith. He challenged us from God's Word how privileged we are as believers living after the coming of Christ. As he preached for nearly an hour on each occasion time was given to putting the message in the context of the whole of God's Word and building upon the truth of the need to show faith in our lives. By the end of the conference all present had been challenged and encouraged in their faith. It was interesting that in a world which seeks to offer more and more comforts, Art reminded us that faith involves hardship and strenuous exertion - even agony and tears. He also explained to us that every event in our lives is an instruction of God's perfect providence and he encouraged us with the fact that the Lord Jesus knows exactly what we need for the race He has marked out for us.

It was a privilege not only to hear God's word but also to meet others with similar convictions, have fellowship and build friendships. It was also an encouragement for those of us from smaller congregations to sing hymns and songs with many more people than at our usual Sunday morning gatherings. Interspersed between Scripture readings and the music were book, magazine and video reviews, while a bookstall catered to those who appreciate the benefits to be gained from reading good books.

A conference cannot succeed without many volunteers behind the scenes; arranging the venues, providing hospitality and preparing food. There was proof in the pudding of this on Sunday as the lunch laid before us was 'Yumo'!

The success of the conferences will continue as God blesses His Word and the friendships begun or strengthened for His glory.

The privilege of Adoption

The Lord Jesus Christ has come in human flesh that his people might to the full realise, grasp, and enjoy, "the adoption of sons." What is it to receive the adoption of sons? Why to feel, 'Now I am under the mastery of love, as a dear child, who is both loved and loving. I go in and out of my Father's house not as a casual servant, called in by the day or the week, but as a child at home. I am not looking for hire as a servant, for I am ever with my Father, and all that he has is mine. My God is my Father, and his countenance makes me glad. I am not afraid of him, but I delight in him, for nothing can separate me from him. I feel a perfect love that casteth out fear, and I delight myself in him.' That is why Christ has come in the flesh - on purpose that you, his people, may be to the full the adopted children of the Lord, acting out and enjoying all the privileges which sonship secures you.

You ought to feel a sweet joy in the perpetual relationship which is now established between you and God. You have been adopted, and God has never cancelled adoption yet. There is such a thing as regeneration, but there is not such a thing as the life then received dying out. The stars may turn to coals, and the sun and moon may become clots of blood, but he that is born of God has a life within him which can never end: he is God's child, and God's child he shall be. Therefore let him walk at large like a child, an heir, a prince of the blood royal, who bears a relationship to the Lord which neither time nor eternity can ever destroy. This is why Jesus was made of a woman and under the law, that he might give us to enjoy the fulness of the privilege of adopted sons.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

from a sermon preached on Sunday 21st December 1884 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle

New Zealand: a Christian country?

JOHN HAVERLAND

New Zealand's Christian history began in 1814 with the arrival of the first missionaries from the Church Missionary Society of the Church of England. Samuel Marsden arrived in the Bay of Islands from Parramatta, Australia, a few days before Christmas. On Christmas Day he led the first service for the Maori inhabitants preaching on Luke 2:10, "Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy." It is worth noting that the first mission work in New Zealand was done through preaching, and that the first subject was the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ. Initially the mission work did not go well, due to unsuitable personnel and the European traders already working in the country. Sealers and whalers had left Europe as adventurers and, on the whole, were "not particularly pious."¹ They did not respond well to the appeal of the missionaries to set a good example for the Maori people. In 1823, however, a sound beginning was made with the arrival of Rev Henry Williams who, two years later, was joined by his younger brother, William. A steady stream of missionaries arrived during the 1820s and 1830s. They developed a generally good relationship with the Maoris, established schools and preached the gospel. The missionaries were well respected and their initial work amongst the Maoris resulted in many conversions.² They did not favour large-scale settlement as they believed this would be detrimental to the Maori. Such settlement would pressure the Maori to give up their land and, they believed, would have a negative effect on their way of life and livelihood. The missionaries supported the Treaty of Waitangi because of the protection it offered to the Maori people.

Organised European settlement began in the 1840s with most of the immigrants coming from England. This shaped New Zealand's cultural and religious life, although other immigrant groups have been influential in the religious character of the nation.

A Christian country?

We have been in the habit of describing NZ as a "Christian" country, even as "God's-own" ("Godzone" – Richard Seddon). This phrase has been used because New Zealand is a beautiful country. Yet it is also true in the sense that our history, traditions, culture and institutions have been shaped by the Bible and a heritage of Western Christianity. We have inherited Christian morals and values and our society was based on and built around Christian principles. This Christian influence and heritage can be seen in the words of our national anthem.

God of Nations at Thy feet
In the bonds of love we meet,
Hear our voices we entreat,
God defend our free land;
Guard Pacific's triple star
From the shafts of strife and war,
Make our praises heard afar,
God defend New Zealand.

Men of every creed and race
Gather here before Thy face,
Asking Thee to bless this place,
God defend our free land;
From dissension, envy hate,
And corruption guard our state,
Make our country good and great,
God defend New Zealand.

May our mountains ever be
Freedom's ramparts on the sea,
Make us faithful unto Thee
God defend our free land;
Guide her in her nation's van
Preaching love and truth to man,
Working out Thy glorious plan,
God defend New Zealand.

Let our love for Thee increase,
May Thy blessings never cease,
Give us plenty, give us peace,
God defend our free land;
From dishonour and from shame,
Guard our country's spotless name,
Crown her with immortal fame,
God defend New Zealand.

This hymn was written by Thomas Bracken and was officially adopted by New Zealand in its centennial year (1940). It is a prayer addressed to the "God of Nations" requesting

that “God defend New Zealand.” Evidence of our Christian heritage can be seen in a number of other areas. Sessions of Parliament are opened with prayer in which we “humbly acknowledge the need for God’s guidance in all things.” When people become citizens of New Zealand they swear an oath which ends with the phrase, “so help me God.” Many New Zealanders gather for prayer services on ANZAC Day to commemorate our soldiers who died fighting in wars that involved our forces. A general Christian influence may be seen on Waitangi Day, in movements such as Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, YMCA, YWCA, and in the annual meetings of a wide range of groups, although we might well question the nature and extent of the Christianity that surfaces in these groups and places.³

On the outside New Zealand has given the appearance of being Christian. Brian Carrell, Bishop of the Wellington diocese of the Anglican Church, gives a good description of the state of the church and Christian faith in Christchurch during the 1940s and 50s in a passage worth quoting at length.

Let me tell you about the world in which I grew up during the 1940’s, the period of the Second World War, in a southern suburb of Christchurch, alongside the Heathcote River. It was a world in which God was ‘in the air’. Not in a spooky sense, but everyone took it for granted that God was real and important. Nearly everyone in my primary school class went to Sunday School or to church somewhere. When it was appropriate the teachers without exception were able to talk naturally about God. We were taught to stand to attention and remove our caps when a funeral passed by. Some Protestant churches seemed always to have closed doors, but all Church of England and Catholic churches were always unlocked, day and night. The church I went to didn’t even have a key!

Churches were not all full, and by no means did everyone go to church. But there were lots of them, all with their ministers. And when Sunday came the whole neighbourhood quietened down and everyone knew that was the day people went to Church. Sunday was patently a day for God. The Press and the Christchurch Star-Sun reported on the Anglican Synod, and the Methodist Conference, and the Presbyterian Assembly with care in those days. The press desk at Synod always had a roster or reporters on duty for any snippets of news. Rarely was a funeral not taken by a minister. The vast majority of children were baptised somewhere, and most weddings would take place in a church. There was no real embarrassment about believing in God – the objects of curiosity in that world were the occasional people who openly admitted being atheists or sceptics.

In brief, there existed what sociologist Peter Berger describes as a ‘plausibility structure’ for Christian faith. This was a legacy of Christendom, a legacy which, though

we did not realise it then, was soon to run dry. But in those decades of the faith-filled 'forties and 'fifties we were still enjoying the afterglow of Christendom: Christian values were assumed as the cement of society, the Church was esteemed as the soul of the community, and God was there.⁴

Francis Schaeffer has described this situation as a “Christian memory”, referring to the remembrance of Christian morals without a solid basis in actual belief. We have inherited a Christian culture and moral framework which has been of immense benefit to us as a nation and still lingers on. However, despite all this outward conformity to Christian values and culture we were not as Christian as we assumed we were. The 1881 census showed that approximately only 20% of the population attended church. Rather than people drifting away from the church we have to admit that many were never really part of it.⁵ Writing in 1962 W. H. Oliver said; “The Christianity which characterises the bulk of the New Zealand people is a vestigial sort which is manifested fitfully, in moral attitudes rather than in explicit beliefs or overt behaviour. It is enshrined, not in any building, but in such phrases as ‘giving a man a fair go’, ‘doing the decent thing’, ‘playing the game’, and ‘lending a hand’ – colloquial debasements of the Golden Rule.”⁶ The appearance of Christianity was often just that – an appearance, a veneer, an external and formal religiosity. We were enjoying the legacy of Christendom – what Peter Berger calls “a plausibility structure” for the Christian faith, and what Brian Carrell describes as “the afterglow of Christendom”. Billy Graham’s evangelistic crusade in 1959 marked the end of this era.

In the 1960s we saw a revolt against the traditions and values of the Christian faith and a rapid crumbling of the moral and religious framework of our nation. Brian Carrell gives us a visual illustration of this.

A couple of years ago we moved into a new home in Palmerston North. It has a magnificent view from my upstairs study window. But it is a changed view. Only five years ago I could have seen from this window All Saints’ church tower, the Catholic Cathedral spire, St. Paul’s Methodist church, and St. Andrew’s Presbyterian church. But now there is only a hint of St. Andrew’s; a glimpse of the Cathedral. Why? Because of the changed landscape. The churches in Palmerston North instead of being dominant features of the skyline, have been crowded out to become insignificant buildings on the sideline. This is a visual representation of what has happened to the place of the Church in society. ‘Christendom’ has become post-Christendom. A friendly environment for the faith has become an alien atmosphere for the Gospel.⁷

The same illustration could be taken from Christchurch where the Cathedral, having

once dominated the profile of the central city, is now hemmed in and overshadowed by the commercial buildings around it, again symbolic of what has happened to the Christian faith. Christendom has largely collapsed in the Western World and in New Zealand. No longer is the Christian faith the dominant or prevailing influence in our culture. We now live in a post-Christian, pagan society. We may have described ourselves as a Christian country in the past, but we can do so no longer. Our nation has been nominally Christian since its founding and is now post-Christian. By far the majority of New Zealanders do not affirm the Christian faith – instead they have a vague humanism that has been distilled from Christian principles.

Our situation is not unique but is one we share with the rest of the Western world. We live in a global village. Western culture has become a global culture. New Zealand is part of world-wide situation that many are describing as “post-modern”. Our culture is shaped by the rest of the world, perhaps even more so than other countries. Our small size and the ease of modern communication has contributed to an openness to (and even an excessive dependence on) overseas influences. In the past we have looked to England; now we tend to look more to the United States.⁸ Partly because of this we have been slow to develop our own religious ethos. Most of the Protestant denominations have been dependant on overseas countries for their theology, leadership, preaching style, order of worship and hymnbooks.⁹

Having said this, we do have our own version of western culture – our situation is unique, as is every country’s. Understanding the features of our own society will help us communicate Christian faith, hope and love to the people of our culture.

Communicating to our culture

Preaching is the primary means of communicating the good news about Jesus. God has commanded us to preach the gospel. Down through the centuries God has blessed the preaching of his Word for the conversion of the lost and the building up of the saved. Pastors are called to preach the message of the Scriptures in a way that is true to their original intent and that demonstrates the relevance of this message for those living here and now. To do this they must understand the times in which we live.

The main beliefs of the modern period still live on – a confidence in man’s reason and an optimistic view of the future based on our technological achievements. Intertwined with these are new ideas that recognise the limitations of our reason and that doubt our ability to solve the massive problems of the world through technology. These new views, however, continue to exclude God from the public arena. Postmodernists go on to question our human ability to know the truth at all. This has encouraged the pluralism of our society where every view is not only tolerated but

celebrated. The affirmation of such a plurality of ideas contributes to the fragmentation of our society. In the modern era this fragmentation produced an extreme individualism; now it is increasingly associated with a growing tribalism. The loss of absolute truth and the approval of pluralism has produced a relativism in morality. When people discarded God and his revelation they lost any firm and sure basis for deciding between right and wrong. Now these matters are decided by the majority or by might, by the greatest number of people or by the person with the most power. In the emptiness of our culture people are seeking to bring purpose and pleasure to their lives by the accumulation of possessions.

What are we to say to the people of this society? How can we communicate the message of the Christian faith to those who seem so far from it?

The Gospel is for Kiwis

After the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, Christianity had to survive and witness in a pagan and pluralist world. In 313 AD Constantine initiated a change in the relationship between Christianity and the culture by officially endorsing the Christian faith. Over the next few hundred years Christianity became the accepted and dominant world view. Despite challenges this dominance continued on in western civilisation until this century. However, the people of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment had attacked the very foundation of Christian belief by shifting the source of authority from God's Word to human reason. Over time Enlightenment ideas infiltrated people's thinking, gradually edging out a Christian mind. The loss of a Christian world-view

In many ways, we have returned to the situation of the first century; we are in a minority position in a pagan and pluralistic society.

became apparent in the 1960s when young people threw off the last remaining restraints of a Christian perspective and 'did their own thing'. Consequently, people in today's setting do not understand the language of the gospel as they did in past generations. Before the 1960s people were familiar at least with Biblical concepts and language. "The task of mission was essentially one of proclamation. The message itself was not foreign to the culture, and could be understood by anyone with ears to hear. From the church's

viewpoint many of the sheep may have been lost to the fold, but at least they knew there was a fold and had some idea of what lostness meant."¹⁰ This is no longer so. Christianity is no longer the prevailing world view but merely one small segment of our society.

There is a great ignorance of the Bible and Christian concepts. Most New Zealanders are biblically illiterate. As we go about the work of preaching and evangelism we can assume that most of our listeners have little or no understanding of the Bible or of the Christian faith.

In many ways, we have returned to the situation of the first century; we are in a minority position in a pagan and pluralistic society. Yet there is one important difference between the first and twenty-first centuries. Pagans in the first century heard the Christian gospel for the first time; Jesus had come, suffered, died, risen and ascended, and the apostles proclaimed this brand new truth. By contrast, in our situation today the gospel has been heard and rejected. This is a post Christian culture in which the Christian faith has been deliberately discarded. Leslie Newbigin points out that the paganism of our western culture, "having been born out of the rejection of Christianity, is far more resistant to the gospel than the pre-Christian paganism with which cross-cultural missions have been familiar. Here, surely, is the most challenging missionary frontier of our time."¹¹

Our role at the beginning of this third millennium will be similar to that of the church at the beginning of the first millennium – it will be the role of a prophet. Rather than being part of the mainstream we will stand on the outside looking in. Yet we are not on the outside as uninterested bystanders. Not at all, for we have a deep concern for the men and women of our society. We have a message from the Lord addressed to the people of our culture.

This message is based on the Word of God. In the hey-day of liberalism the church was too busy listening to the 'wisdom' of the day and was asking; "What does modern man have to say to the church?" This is the wrong way round. Instead we should be asking, "What does the church have to say to modern man?"¹² All that the church has to say to modern man must come from the Scriptures. If it does not we are merely passing on our own thoughts and ideas. These will be of little or no help to people who need to hear words of life. Therefore, in order to communicate usefully to our world preachers and pastors need a thorough and comprehensive knowledge of the Scriptures. We need to be well-grounded in the Word of the Lord.

Yet we also need a good knowledge of men and women today. To be effective missionaries to our culture we need to understand how we came to be where we are,

*...our confidence lies
in the sovereignty of
God and in the power
of the Holy Spirit to
change the hard and
cold hearts of our
hearers so that they
truly repent and
believe in the Lord.*

and we need a good grasp of our current situation. We cannot assume that we will know this automatically, because the situation has changed so much in the last few decades, and is still changing. We need to understand why our society is the way it is and keep abreast of where it is going. To be relevant to a new situation does not mean that we should alter the essential message of the Christian faith. Instead we need a critical evaluation of our present context and the application of the unchanging truth of the Scriptures to this changing world.

In many respects the present outlook is sobering. There are examples of heresy as churches become careless about the truth; of blasphemy as Christians lose their reverence for the Lord; of nonsense as evangelical believers get caught up with whatever is current; of weirdness as Christians become weak and flabby in their understanding of the Bible and vulnerable to leaders who have an "appearance of wisdom" (Colossians 2:23) but who preach false doctrine and error. Our growing pluralism provides fertile ground for the rapid growth of alternatives to the gospel. These include a revival of pre-Christian paganism promoted by liberal churches, as well as speculative gnosticism dressed up in its New Age clothing. The widespread disintegration of marriage and the family contributes to crises that mount up year by year. Our postmodern disregard for truth raises many questions and doubts in people's minds.

In the light of these problems some may feel pessimistic about the possibilities of reaching New Zealanders with the gospel. After all, churches have been trying to do this for some time and have constantly sought new strategies to reach the lost and cause the church to grow. One technique after another has been attempted. We have seen a succession of visiting speakers from North America promoting one or another programme. Various targets have been set for the evangelisation of New Zealand and denominations have promoted a decade of evangelism. As yet we have seen little fruit for all this effort. One writer reflects on our situation in these words; "Things are not good in New Zealand. The life of the Church in New Zealand is not healthy. The Christian movement in New Zealand over all, is in decline.... Our backs are to the wall; the tide is currently turning against us, but there are little signs that the tide could be going to turn."¹³ While we need to be realistic about our present situation we need not be pessimistic. We are called to be witnesses for the Lord. There is a time of sowing and a time of reaping. Some plant a seed, others water it, but God makes it grow (1 Corinthians 3:6). Here is an opportunity to proclaim the gospel and we must make good use of it.

Furthermore, there are also some more hopeful signs. With the decline of modernism some of Christianity's traditional rivals, such as humanism, secularism, Marxism, and Freudianism, are at their lowest ebb for four hundred years.¹⁴ The

church is in bad shape but the opponents of the church are also in disarray. This presents the church with a great opportunity to present the gospel in a powerful and persuasive way. There are also some positive aspects to preaching the gospel to this nation. We live in a small country and this makes the population reachable. We have a comparatively short history and so we are not weighed down by a long tradition of having to do things in a certain way. Although New Zealand has remained a homogenous society for most of her history she has been open to new ideas. Our small size has meant that new thoughts are easily taken up and implemented. One obvious example of this is the way New Zealand led the world in the welfare reforms of the late nineteenth century. Another example is the rapid application of the free enterprise economic policies of the 1980's which became known as 'Rogernomics'. The smallness and newness of New Zealand makes us more receptive to change. Consider too that the Bible has never been more available for people and we have the benefits of communicating and disseminating information by modern technological means such as the world wide web and electronic-mail. Finally, our confidence lies in the sovereignty of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit to change the hard and cold hearts of our hearers so that they truly repent and believe in the Lord Jesus.

That God is sovereign does not mean that we can sit back. To be good witnesses in New Zealand Christians must be prepared to stand apart from the culture and society. One major problem in Western European culture was that many people regarded themselves as being Christians and as part of the church, when they were not – they were hypocrites. The present situation provides the church with a new opportunity for witness. Here is a new challenge for the church because there are clear lines between the church and the world. Brian Carrell, speaking to Anglicans, addresses this issue by saying; "it is no longer going to be enough to be carried along on the coat-tails of our predecessors, letting our Christianity be little more than a modicum of decency plus an occasional visit to church. It needs more private passion and public profession."¹⁵ We are to be a pilgrim people, bearing witness for the Lord as people whose citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:17-21). As the people of God we are called to "live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Peter 2:12). We who are ministers of the gospel need to be godly in our lives, living as examples to those around us. We also need to be men who obviously and sincerely believe the Bible and who preach it with ability, clarity and conviction. Our task is to preach to believers so that they are equipped and motivated to live out and speak forth their faith. Then they will be able to proclaim the truth of God's Word with courage and power. They will be able to live as Christians in the place God has put them, in their sphere of activity and influence. Our task as believers "is to show our nation that there is another way of looking, another

way of living, another way of understanding the universe and our place in it, another way that begins and ends in Jesus Christ."¹⁶

Our mission field is right here, on our doorstep, over the back fence, in our workplace. Certainly we have a mission responsibility overseas, but we need to recognise that we live in a society where approximately 90% of New Zealanders do not have a saving faith in Christ. We need to "make disciples of all nations" beginning in this country (Matthew 28:19). We are ambassadors of Christ, proclaiming the good news about Jesus, urging that people "Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Introducing the papers of the 1993 Vision New Zealand Congress, Bruce Patrick wrote; "New Zealand's majority culture, media-massaged and educated to be more secular than most, inoculated against the life-changing power of the gospel by long exposure to religious formalism and caricature Christianity, now needs missionaries as skilled and dedicated as any in the world."¹⁷

This article has been compiled from passages in the newly published book, Feed My Sheep. See inside back cover for details.

Notes:

1. Peter Lineham, *New Zealand Religious History*, Study Guide One, (Palmerston North: Massey University, Department of History, 1998), p.76.
2. Among the many books and articles describing this period is, William Williams, *Christianity Among the New Zealanders*, (London: Seely, Jackson and Halliday, 1867). This was reprinted by the Banner of Truth Trust in 1989.
3. Brown, "Religion in New Zealand: Past, Present and Future," in *Religion and New Zealand's Future*, The Seventh Auckland Religious Studies Colloquium, Kevin J. Shape, ed., (Palmerston North, 1982), pp.15-22.
4. Brian Carrell, "Breaking through the Barriers to Faith Today," in John Crawshaw and Wayne Kirkland, *New Zealand Made: Perspectives on Mission in Aotearoa* (Wellington: Signpost Communications, 1994), pp.65-66.
5. Bruce Patrick, Ed, *New Vision New Zealand*, Vol.II, (Auckland, Vision New Zealand, 1997), p.23.
6. Quoted by Brian Colless and Peter Donovan, eds., *Religion in New Zealand Society* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1980), p.27, from W. H. Oliver, *The Habit of Establishment*, Comment 12:4-5, 1962.
7. Carrell, "Breaking Through the Barriers of Faith Today," pp.68-69.
8. Brown, "Religion in New Zealand", p.16.
9. This could be seen as another evidence of New Zealanders' lack of interest in religion. Ian Breward, "The Protestant Contribution," in *Religion in New Zealand Society*, pp.67-80.
10. Brian Smith, "Christianity: Learning a Second Language," *New Zealand Made*, p.48.
11. Leslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks - The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), p.20.
12. Peter Berger, *Facing up to Modernity*, (New York: Basic Books, 1977), pp.232-233.
13. "New Zealand as a Mission Field: The Paradigm Shift," *The Vision New Zealand Congress*, 1993, p.53.
14. Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What To Do About It* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994), p.150.
15. Brian Carrell, "Reaching out to the Ninety-Nine," *The 1995 Stubbs Memorial Sermon*.
16. Brian Carrell, "Addressing a Secular Society," *The Vision New Zealand Congress*, 1993, p.79.
17. Bruce Patrick, Foreword, *The Vision New Zealand Congress*, 1993, p.7.

Book Reviews

Holiness

J. C. Ryle

Evangelical Press

Paperback 352 pages ISBN 0-85234-136-9

G&T price: \$32.95 (incl. NZ postage)

Ryle's *Holiness* has long been regarded as one of the classics of Christian literature. Some modern readers may find the language of the Victorian era unfamiliar, but don't let that be an obstacle, persistence will be rewarded. The early chapters entitled "Sin", "Sanctification" and "Holiness", which define the subject can be hard going and some may like to leave them to come back to once the rest of the book has been read. These chapters are well worth the effort required to master them. Too often we get bogged down in the definitions of various terms and what they mean. This doesn't happen here. After laying the foundation of definitions in the early chapters Ryle deals with the subject in a simple and practical way, taking biblical examples to illustrate what the topic is really all about in real daily living. Few readers will have trouble in identifying with the examples drawn from the lives of Moses, Lot or even Lot's wife. Nor can you escape the implications of the Lord Jesus' question to Peter, "Do you love Me?", for our own lives. Each chapter is complete on it's own so that it is very easy to read a chapter at a time.

Though Bishop Ryle leaves no doubt about what holiness and its related topics mean, this is not a book of theoretical

doctrine but a practical challenge to a holy life. We are nearing the end of reading Bishop Ryle's *Holiness* as a congregational exercise and the verdict is unanimous as to its blessing. The effort has been more than worthwhile. Those who found the language a little off putting in the beginning soon mastered it, and I am sure, if you have not already read it, you too will find *Holiness* a gem to read.

John Leevers

Bitesize Theology

Peter Jeffery

Evangelical Press

Paperback 112 pages ISBN 0-85234-447-3

G&T price: \$8.95 (incl. NZ postage)

Do you like cookies? If so, you will perhaps know the frustration of discovering that someone has hidden them or placed them out of reach! Peter Jeffery likens this

book to a cookie jar containing a delicious selection of 'bitesize theology', and all within the grasp of the young as well as the mature believer.

In his usual clear style Peter Jeffery guides the reader through God's Word in an exploration of key Christian doctrines. The twenty chapters may be bitesize, but their contents are very satisfying. Covering a range of theological topics including the Godhead, sin and the various aspects of salvation from election to sanctification, there is much to challenge and encourage the Christian in this little book. Most chapters end with questions designed to stimulate thought, as well as a recommended book for further study on the subject at hand.



Groping in Darkness

DAVID MARSHALL

There is in the heart of man a longing for the holy. There is an abiding dissatisfaction with the sense of cosmic lostness that has gripped the human race ever since our first parents lost their intimate communion with God and were expelled from the garden of Eden. This can be denied but it cannot be eradicated. Solomon wrote, "He [God] has also set eternity in the hearts of men" (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

The modern church seems determined to refute this proposition. Taking its cue from the postmodern mindset it has opted for the light and frothy. Cute little jingles have replaced the great hymns of the faith. Encouraging pep talks salted with humour have taken the place of searching expositions of the scriptures. An emphasis on the horizontal at the expense of the vertical has pervaded church services. Relevance, rather than reverence, is the catchword.

Continued overleaf

Book Reviews (continued)

This book is ideal for new Christians to read by themselves, or as the basis for a study group. Heartily recommended!

My Heart in His Hands

Sharon James

Evangelical Press

Paperback 240 pages ISBN 0-85234-421-X

G&T price: \$23.95 (incl. NZ postage)

This is the biography of the first wife of Adoniram Judson, a contemporary of William Carey and pioneer missionary to Burma (now Myanmar). Ann Judson was a remarkable woman who showed great faith in God and incredible courage in a strange and often hostile land.

This is a moving and engrossing account of a life devoted to God and to helping her husband in His missionary service. Without Ann's dedication and care Adoniram would almost certainly have perished during a term

of imprisonment. Without her assistance in translation work and in teaching the women the mission work would, humanly speaking, have been much weaker.

"The intensity of the spirituality of Ann Judson was matched only by the compelling drama of her story. Her courage... dedication... loyalty... and her disregard of personal risk seem almost superhuman. Yet she was only too human in that she suffered greatly; she was not hard, insensitive or cold. She was a woman who loved intensely, loved her husband, loved her children, loved the people of Burma, but above all loved her God."

Sharon James has written a wonderfully engaging account of this remarkable woman, weaving selections from her memoirs and letters, together with other first-hand accounts, to give us a challenging and encouraging story of love, courage and dedication to God.

All the books reviewed here are available from Grace & Truth Publications. See page 13 for contact details.

Yet it won't wash. And so there is a movement back to ceremonies and ritual. Evangelical churches are now adorned with banners. The use of candles is increasing. They first appeared in weddings and Christmas services but are becoming accepted in normal weekly services. Incense must be on the way. Ministers in the Uniting Church of Australia have taken to wearing cowls. In America there has been a drift of evangelicals into the Orthodox Church. Franky Schaeffer, son of Francis Schaeffer, is the most prominent example of this phenomenon. Others have taken the Canterbury trail. While most evangelical churches would not yet come at processions they are happy to take part in Jesus Marches. When the reality of the faith fades the ritual grows in significance.

How are we to answer these developments? Surely we need to stand with the Reformers and declare that God is encountered in His Word. When some of his disciples turned back and no longer followed Him Jesus asked the Twelve if they also wanted to leave. Peter answered for them, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69). Peter had come to understand that Jesus was holy, that He was 'totally other'. His empty and lost heart was drawn to this 'otherness'. But he had also realised that he experienced this encounter with the holy primarily through the words that Jesus spoke. In this he was reflecting the teaching of his Lord. Jesus said, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63).

Later in life, reflecting back, Peter would write, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Peter 1:3-4). When Peter speaks of "his very great and precious promises" he is of course referring to the words of Scripture. Paul picked up the same emphasis on the Word of God. He wrote of, "the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 3:15). He declared, "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). Hence his admonition to Timothy was, "devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching" (1 Timothy 4:13), or in short, "Preach the Word" (2 Timothy 4:2).

Ultimately the church has nothing to offer unless it will unashamedly proclaim the whole counsel of God. God is still pleased to reveal Himself through his Word. Nothing else will meet the needs of the human heart.

NEW
FEED MY SHEEP

**Preaching the Gospel in a
Postmodern New Zealand Society**

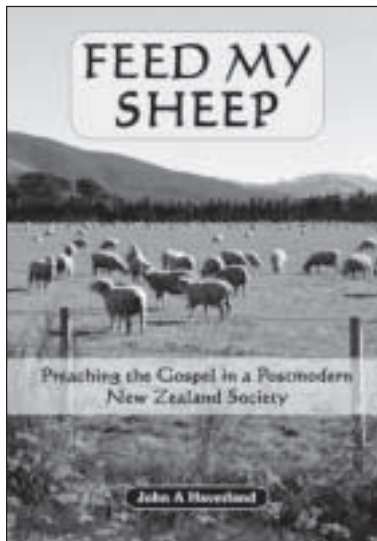
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This is a book about preaching specifically written for the New Zealand context, though the analysis also applies to other countries in our western world. Pastors will find this useful as it provides them with a theology of preaching and encourages them to devote themselves to this task. New Zealand Christians will also benefit from this book as it outlines some important features of our history as a nation and analyses key characteristics of our present society, illustrating these with historical and contemporary examples. The book provides many practical suggestions and applications for communicating the Christian faith in a postmodern New Zealand context.

Feed My Sheep is a plea for preaching - for sound, exegetical, expository preaching. It is also a plea for *relevant* preaching that explains where we have come from and where we are, and that applies the truth of God's Word to the situation around us today.

John Haverland grew up in Christchurch, has pastored a church in Auckland and is presently the pastor of the Reformed Church of Bishopdale in Christchurch.

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The articles in this magazine reflect the body of biblical doctrine summarised in the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. Contributors are allowed reasonable freedom in the exposition of those truths; the editors do not necessarily endorse every view expressed.

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Cover Picture

The South Island pastoral scene featured on the front cover of an important new book examining the vital place of preaching in our New Zealand society.
(see inside back cover)