

EDITORIAL - EASTER

As I write this article for Contender, many people worldwide will be celebrating Easter. We, indeed also, may attend Church an extra time in order to commemorate and remember what Christ has done for us in more detail. We remember the lead up to His capture, His betrayal, His trial, His crucifixion, and ultimately His death. Doesn't it seem odd to remember Christ's death? Why not remember something glorious and splendid, not gruesome and morbid!

Yet, every year, we attend an extra Church service in order to remember Christ's death on the cross. We remember, not so that we don't forget all the facts and details, but that our faith is strengthened. We also remember Easter for another important reason. This reason is far more lasting and enduring than this life on earth. We remember Christ's death, because we look forward one day to our eternal death...to sin! In other words we will not eradicate the remnant of our sinful nature from within us until our physical death on this earth. It is only then we will be renewed eternally, free of our sinfulness.

But, Christ's death does not only benefit us in the life to come. We also have the benefits in this life already. The old nature, within us, in this life already is put to death continually, and the new nature is put on. There is a daily struggle with sin, via which we put off the old sinful nature and thus put on the new nature. Romans chapter 6 speaks about Christ's payment for sin and how we should **use** Christ's death, "*For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection...*" We **have** been united (or baptised; verse 4) into His death; it is a certainty! We therefore have an obligation to respond, also out of thankfulness, to His death and the payment of our sin.

As we go to church, let us also remember, that Easter is not simply a story about God's Son. It has meaning for us today...indeed everyday of our lives. We should, in some way, remember Christ's death every single day of our existence. And we should do so by fighting daily against our sin and by daily putting on the new nature.

BRUCE HUZINGA

APRIL 2005	VOLUME 10	ISSUE 2
EASTER – B HUZINGA		1
TO BE OR NOT TO BE MARRIED – R VERMEULEN		2
ON THE OTHER HAND RESPONSE – A HORDYK		3
GOOD NEIGHBOURS – A WITTEN		4
ON THE OTHER HAND		6
ON A MISSION – E DEKKER		6
FOOD FOR THOUGHT		7

TO BE OR NOT TO BE...MARRIED

The bride walks down the aisle, love shining from her eyes as she looks towards her husband-to-be. The groom grins, if he isn't too nervous, with joy and pride, as he sees his beloved in her elaborate white dress.

Familiar scene isn't it? For the Free Reformed Churches this summer has really been the summer for weddings. Two people pledge their lives to each other – promise to love and remain faithful to each other, to assist each other in their godly walk of life.

It sounds like 'the ultimate', 'the perfect fairy tale,' doesn't it? But then, not every life has this fairy tale in it. Some feel that life has short-changed them – that they haven't quite 'made it'. On top of their own sometimes inferior feelings because of their singleness they have to put up with the continual jibes from family members, friends, even elders. "So, have you got a boyfriend yet?" "Are you ever going to get married" or even worse, the patronizing sympathy. In our circles, it seems that marriage is traditionally seen as the 'be all and end all'.

But is it?

"GOD HAS CREATED ALL HIS CHILDREN AS EQUAL INDIVIDUALS, WHETHER MARRIED OR SINGLE."

It must be recognized that God has designed men and women for each other. We read in Genesis 2:18 "The LORD God said 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'". However, just as God brings a boy and girl together and leads them towards marriage, it is also true that sometimes God does not give one of His children a marriage partner, or gives them a husband or wife later on in life.

Should that be something that we are embarrassed about or discontent with? No, for God knows what is best for our lives. So, the question 'Why aren't you married yet?' needs a simple answer "Because God, in His wisdom, is waiting for His time, not mine." But the point of this article is not to discuss suitable responses to these questions, but rather to discuss whether these questions should be asked.

God has created all His children as equal individuals, whether married or single. He has called each one of us to live a life pleasing to Him, to grow in faith and develop our talents and to give glory to Him in all situations. Age and marital-status should NOT be an issue.

"AGE AND MARITAL-STATUS SHOULD NOT BE AN ISSUE."

We are to accept our own situation and position in life, and also the situation of our brother or sister, and see them as equals in faith regardless of their marital-status. Love for our neighbour means that we encourage each other in faith, and show love and acceptance to each other in all situations.

All growing Christians need encouragement and stimulation. A husband and wife can provide this for each other. They assist each other in the walk of faith, learn, grow and pray together. But if you go through life as a single it doesn't mean you have an excuse to stay stagnant. If you do not move forward, you can very easily become bitter or cynical about life, and somewhat envious of those who have families. Even worse, you might start to go backwards. Instead, we must move on, knowing that God knows what is best for us, that we are special in His eyes, and that in all we do we must continue to grow. And so, just like those who are married, singles are to play an active role in the church.

Being involved in the various activities will usually provide the encouragement and stimulation that one needs.

Paul outlines the reason why we must all continue to do this in Romans 12:4-8 "For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness."

By using our gifts and talents to serve God and His church, we demonstrate good reason to be treated

equally – not as one who never quite 'made it', but as a mature and growing Christian; not as a bitter

and cynical person dissatisfied with their lot in life, but as a thankful child of God, who accepts God's design for their lives.

At the same time, those who have boyfriends and girlfriends should not display a self-satisfied attitude and stir up those who haven't got someone special yet. See each other as equals in the Kingdom of God, rather than 'haves and have-nots'.

Let's not make age and marital-status the deciding standard in our circles, and instead build each other up in the faith, so that as brothers and sisters in Christ we may serve and glorify God together, in unity of mind.

ROSE VERMEULEN

ON THE OTHER HAND RESPONSE

Dear Editor,

The question of religious bumper stickers (On the Other Hand - Issue 1 2005) and the like is sure to bring out an interesting discussion. At a first glance, perhaps, we might be quick to criticise such a way of witnessing as being 'too charismatic' or irreverent. But perhaps there is more to this issue than first meets the eye.

How can we criticise the way another person witnesses their faith? Unless it is blasphemy, which God Himself condemns, by what authority can we rebuke another person for publicly displaying his religious view?

It seems ironic that we proudly place stickers on the back of our car announcing to the world what radio station we listen to, or what political party we prefer, or even what beer we drink but seem to hesitate to display what God we serve.

We walk around every day wearing brand (over-priced) clothing, freely advertising for those companies without giving it too much thought. By the picture or words on our clothes anyone can tell

what car model we like or what sporting team we follow. But the thought of displaying the message of salvation on our shirts, or on the bumper of the car, is usually regarded as irreverent and disrespectful.

Is it reverent or glorifying to God when those people in the car behind us know we drink Emu Bitter, and listen to 96FM, but has no idea we belong to the Free Reformed Church?

If we publicly witnessed our faith for all to see, be it through clothing, jewellery or stickers, we would also be a lot more liable to being approached or questioned about our faith.

Perhaps we would also be reminded how often we are not acting (or driving) in a manner suitable to a professing Christian.

Is this what we are afraid of?

ADRIAN HORDYK

GOOD NEIGHBOURS

It's important to be friendly to your neighbours. Particularly if they know that you are a Christian. Your behaviour can have a big effect on what they think about your God.

You may have seen this picture: Prime Minister John Howard and Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in an embrace during the Prime Minister's first visit to our neighbour after the Tsunami waves brought widespread destruction and loss of human life. The image was symbolic of the nation's gratitude for Australia's compassionate outpouring of support in their hour of need. Symbolic also, of Australia's sympathy and deep condolences for Indonesia's devastating loss. However this image is important for another reason. It signifies also a genuine reconciliation between these two neighbours. The war on terrorism and the 1999 debacle in East Timor had made Australia and Indonesia two neighbours on really unfriendly terms. And this had the potential to have a big effect on what Indonesians thought about Australia's God.

***“ALTHOUGH AUSTRALIA
INSISTS THAT THE WAR ON
TERRORISM IS NOT A WAR
ON ISLAM, MANY ISLAMIC
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DISAGREE.”***

Ever since the September 11th terrorist attacks by Muslim extremists and the “War on Terror” that followed, tensions have been escalating between Australia and Indonesia. Home to many adherents of the Islamic religion; Indonesia strongly disapproved of Australia's involvement in the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Although Australia insists that the war on terrorism is not a war on Islam, many Islamic fundamentalists seem to disagree. In Indonesia they have expressed this in three serious terrorist attacks in three years. In 2002 the bombing

of the Sari nightclub on the resort island of Bali killed 202 people, including 88 Australians. In 2003 an explosion at Jakarta's Marriott hotel killed 12 people. And most recently in September 2004, nine Indonesians died in an attack on the Australian embassy (Loebis 28).

These attacks outraged ordinary Indonesians and brought pledges from the Indonesian government to fight terrorist groups like Jemaah Islamiah who are based in Indonesia (Loebis 27). However Indonesia and other South East Asian countries do not like Australia to meddle in their affairs, even if it's in the name of fighting terrorism. When John Howard announced in September 2004 that there was a flying squadron based in Australia, ready to be deployed on intelligence reports from overseas, the Malaysian International Affairs Bureau Chairman Senator Datuk gave this icy response: “Malaysia is all for the fight against terror but can hardly be expected to compromise on her dignity and sovereignty” (Bernama Malaysian News 22 Sept. 2004).

Therefore despite the often good intentions on the part of both governments “Islamic terrorism” and “the fight against terror” have produced tension between neighbours.

Yet Australian and Indonesian unfriendliness has deeper roots than September 11th. You might remember how on August 30th 1999, nearly 80% of voters in the Indonesian province of East Timor voted for independence from Indonesia. Later in September militias supported by the Indonesian Army went on a rampage committing wholesale murder, rape, torture and the forced removal of thousands of

East Timorese (The Economist 5 Feb. 2000). Faced with the inactivity of the Indonesian government to protect the East Timorese the United Nations Security Council authorised an international force lead by Australia to intervene to protect the East Timorese people. We might say that Australia could not have acted with more transparently noble

motives, yet many in Indonesia did not see it that way. The Indonesian media described Australia's involvement in East Timor as "arrogant" and a "betrayal." (Cotton 228)

What could be the impact of this unfriendliness between neighbours (even though we might protest that it isn't Australia's fault) have on the way in which Indonesians view Australia's God?

I say Australia's God. But we who live in Australia know that our country seems to be less and less God-fearing every year. In many key areas our government has discarded God's norms in favour of tastes of a secular society. To us it seems incorrect to speak of "Australia's God". In addition aren't there are also many Indonesian Christians as well?

**"THEREFORE IF
UNBELIEVING INDONESIANS
MISTRUST AUSTRALIA, THEY
WILL ALSO MISTRUST
CHRISTIANITY."**

All the same, the reality is that many of the non-Christian people who make up the vast majority of Indonesians, equate Australia (and the whole Western world) with Christianity. And really who can blame them? Our nation was founded on Christian principles. God's name is still mentioned in our National Anthem and included in the preamble of our constitution. If you don't live here or read our newspapers you're really not going to make any fine distinctions.

Therefore if unbelieving Indonesians mistrust Australia they will also mistrust Christianity.

Think of it this way, if you had an argument with that unbelieving neighbour yesterday he is pretty unlikely to take up your offer to join you in Church this Sunday is he not?

For this reason the opportunity for reconciliation offered by the Tsunami disasters was so important.

It gave Australia the opportunity to demonstrate kindness, mercy and unselfishness toward Indonesia. This reflects well on Australia and therefore provides a powerful message about Christianity.

**"FOR THIS REASON THE
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Australia and Indonesia started 2005 as bad neighbours. Tension over the "War on Terror" and bad feelings about East Timor clouded the horizon. How could Indonesia trust this so-called Christian nation to the south? The unparalleled open-handedness of Australia in Indonesia's hour of need paved the way for a better relationship between our governments and our peoples.

We can see that despite the horrific human tragedy of the Tsunami disasters, they are used by the Almighty to make progress in a country where so many people continue to be held in the grip of a false religion. We hope and pray that many more Indonesians may see the kindness of Australians and want to learn more about the Christian God.

AREND WITTEN

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A note from the Editor,

They come and they go. This time Bruce has decided to hang up his pen (or keyboard as the case may be), and he has tendered his resignation. We bid him a very fond farewell, and we thank him for his contribution to Contender over the past years.

The gap he leaves is being filled by Colette Groenewold. We welcome her to the editors team, and look forward to her contribution. Welcome aboard!!

We also say farewell to Bronya, our IT wizard. She has been doing all the layout work for some time, but other commitments have forced her to quit. Thank you, Bronya, for your dedication, and for your willingness to help out for as long as you did. The work she did will now be undertaken by one (or more) of the editors. We'll see how that turns out.

We hope that God may continue to bless the efforts of this team as we continue to do all we can to produce the Contender regularly and on time.

ERIC DEKKER

ON THE OTHER HAND**On the Other Hand...**

You often hear the statement that every generation goes a step further in deformation. If this is true, then how come the church still exists after hundreds of generations have been and gone?

Send replies to eric.dekker@frsa.asn.au

ON A MISSION**PURE GOLD**

I read a story¹ the other week...

Many years ago the Parsis arrived in India. They are the direct descendents of the Persians of King Cyrus that we know from the Bible. They moved to India to escape the persecution of Muslims. The Maharajah of Gujarat – the Indian kingdom where they landed – was apprehensive and asked for a bowl filled with milk to be brought to the court. He said, “My land is this bowl, the milk is my people. The bowl is full.”

The leader of the Parsis replied by slipping off his gold ring and gently dropping it in the bowl. He said, “We shall be like this ring. We will not displace the locals, we maintain our own identity and shall be of worth.” The king allowed them to stay.

The Parsis have been as good as their leader’s word; for more than 1200 years the Parsis have made a tremendous contribution to India, yet maintaining their own identity and religion.

¹ Quoted with permission from Mission News Mt Nasura, Vol. 8, Issue 6.

The Parsi fellow who told this story to Mt Nasura's Mission Work representatives also said *that his people were "going less" and that "his culture is declining". When asked the reasons he replied "Our young people are marrying for partners and do not go for our culture and our ways. We are all the Parsis in the world, not even Iran has any." He was quite sad about it.*

I sat back and thought about this statement. The Parsi recognised that his people were slowly disappearing due to a reluctance of its members to maintain a purity of worship, a purity of lifestyle...

It's a bit like cordial really. You get it in its purist form and it is so strong you don't want to drink it. But the more you mix water with it, the less taste it has – until eventually it can't be tasted at all.

It made me think about God's words to His people. What did He say? Well, God spoke in terms of light and darkness...They don't mix.

It's not for nothing that God compares His people to the world in these terms. God forbids mixing. He

knows that just as cordial cannot be tasted when it is diluted with too much water, so also a Christian cannot be recognized when diluted with too much of the world.

We would be very well advised to think about this Parsi's words when choosing life partners. Are we ensuring that, as a church, as the bride of Christ, we are remaining gold in a bowl of milk, or are we sugar cubes slowly dissolving...?

So why is this article called "On a Mission"? For this reason, there are times when we need to be on a mission of reformation.

Do you remember that you have a responsibility to remain pure in all of life?

Do you show in all of your life that you are a Christian? Do you show (do you *know...*) your identity?

Are you a blatant Christian?

Perhaps a personal reformation should be your next mission...

ERIC DEKKER

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

STOP - THINK

Have you ever stopped to wonder
 What this life is all about?
 Why you're here and where you're going
 When your lease of time runs out?
 Maybe you've been far too busy,
 Trying hard to reach your goal;
 Would you let me ask you kindly,
 Have you thought about your soul?

Don't forget your days are numbered,
 Though you may be riding high,
 But, like all of us poor mortals,
 Someday, you'll surely have to die.
 Your success and fame and glory,
 Won't be worth the bell they toll;
 Let me ask you just one question,
 Have you thought about your soul?

You may reach the highest portals,
 And your dreams may all come true,
 Wealth and fame may be your portion,
 And success may shine on you.
 All your friends may sing your praises,
 Not a care on you may roll;
 What about the great tomorrow –
 Have you thought about your soul?

If you've never thought it over,
 Spend a little time today;
 There is nothing more important,
 That will ever come your way,
 Than the joys of sins forgiven,
 And to know you've been made whole,
 In the name of Christ YOUR Saviour,
 STOP and THINK about your soul.

Anonymous

Aim:

Romans 12:2 teaches all of God's people:

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

This magazine will encourage its readers to earnestly contend for the faith, and to think and act biblically, in the good traditions of the Church of all ages. Its basis is God's word, as the Church confesses in the Three Forms of Unity. It is intended for the younger members of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, and is produced in co-operation with the Una Sancta. Subscription to the Contender is automatic with subscription to the Una Sancta.

It is not meant to be exclusively for unmarried members who still attend the Youth Bible Study Clubs, but for all those who fit within the loose parameters of 16 to 30 years of age.

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