

EDITORIAL

(Young) Brothers and sisters,
Welcome to the first issue of your Contender for 2006.

At various points in our lives we make “new beginnings” or “a fresh start.” And very often there are many good reasons why we choose to do so. A new beginning allows a person, in their mind, to put something behind them, to move on and make progress in life. Sometimes a new beginning involves leaving a negative habit behind, for example smoking or excessive drinking. At other times the “new beginning” simply allows a person to progress in life, for example a student leaves behind school to attend university or take on a job, or a young man and a young woman decide to marry, the two of them leaving a singles life behind. In both cases the goal is to move forward in life, to make progress.

The apostle Paul, Peter, and the author of the letter to the Hebrews recognized that Christians need to make progress in life, specifically spiritual progress. (See 1 Corinthians 3, 1 Peter 2, Hebrews 5:12 -6:8). All three authors use the example of a young child, a baby that in the first weeks of its life is nourished on just milk.

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However as the child grows the mother begins to supplement its diet with solid food, according to what the child can handle, until the child is fully mature. It is the same way with young Christians. When we are young we are taught Bible stories, psalms, and often a meal time prayer and a bed time prayer. But as we become older, and our understanding increases we are more able to understand God as being our Father, appreciate God's work for us in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to actively live a life of faith through the working of the Holy Spirit.

However our spiritual progress does not finish when we become a young adult or when we do profession of faith. Spiritual progress is necessary all through our life. Constantly we need to busy ourselves in a life of service to God. The author of the letter to the Hebrews even specifically warns of the perils attached when we fail to make spiritual progress. Have a read of Hebrews 6:1-8. This is quite a hard passage to understand, so perhaps our younger readers might like to discuss it with Dad or Mum or an older brother/sister as well.

In a sense we have just commenced a new beginning as well. The year 2006 lies before us. Many of our normal Christian routines have commenced. Some of you will have started school again, or perhaps you are in the process of commencing TAFE or university. Bible study club meetings are beginning again, as well as catechism classes. The elders also begin the home visit season.

The beginning of the year, (and indeed the holiday season that preceded it) is an opportune time to consider your own life. It provides time to reflect on the things that kept you busy in the past year and to give consideration for the things that will keep you busy during this year. It is also a good time to give serious thought to your spiritual progress in life, to consider your life of faith and love for God's service. Perhaps you might decide that you need to make some "new beginnings" or that you need to make a

renewed commitment in some aspect of your life. This is not something you need to feel silly about, but it is exactly in line with what the apostles teach. This is making spiritual progress and you can be assured that it will be a positive for your life.

You may find it personally quite difficult to make spiritual progress and there is good reason for this. It is because there are three sworn enemies who are constantly attacking us; they are trying to undermine our faith, to destroy our confidence in God and to detract our attention away from the service of God. These enemies are of course the Devil, the World, and our own sinful flesh. You can probably think of things in your own life, how each of these enemies are busy trying to make you sin.

At the beginning of this article I welcomed the first issue of Contender to you. This magazine is published because it recognizes the need for everyone including the youth to make spiritual progress in life. It also recognizes that in the day and age that we live this can be difficult; there are many distractions out there. Therefore it is my wish that through the pages of this magazine you may be informed, you may be instructed, you may receive comfort, and you can be encouraged and equipped in God's service.

Many years ago Jude wrote to some believers in a similar vein urging them to "contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude :3) and to maintain their life with God (vs 20, 21). He recognized that in our own strength we are unable to do this. Two thousand years later we can but only agree and therefore in concluding this editorial I quote his last two verses:

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to God our Saviour who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen."

Eric Terpstra

The Light of God (an explanation of the Contender front cover)

*He wraps Himself in light as with a garment;
He stretches out the heavens like a tent
and lays the beams of his upper chambers on
their waters.*

*He makes the clouds His chariot
and rides on the wings of the wind.*

Psalm 104:2,3

The rays of light we so often see reflecting paths on our beautiful coastal waters is a symbol in Scripture of the Light of God. The new cover of the Contender encapsulates a message of this light: our calling to reflect the divine Glory of God to those around us.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth. Ephesians 5:8,9

Our Father, our Creator, and the creator of the heavenly light, sent His only Son to save us from the darkness of sin, and gave to us the Holy Spirit to open our hearts to this Gospel. With renewed hearts, we have to strive day by day to flee from sin and delight in all righteousness, praising God for the good work He is doing in us. As ambassadors for Christ, our duty and our will is to contend for the faith He has given us, to shine God's Glory on this earth until the eternal Kingdom of light.

The blue vertical lines that form a cross in the core of the light source, and then extend over the illustration, are symbol of God's endless gifts to us; His Son on the cross, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of eternal life (James 1:17). The light shining through the

dark clouds and then shimmering on the waters is the Glory of God that we reflect as followers of Christ fighting the good fight of faith. As servants of God, we become 'fishers of men', telling others of the hope of Christ, this truth depicted in the fishing boat on the back of the Contender.

I urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. Jude 1:3b

Let the Awesome Light be a reminder of God's central place in our lives, that we build up our faith and become a light to others, until we enter with Him in the eternal Kingdom that is to come.

But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in His own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To Him be honour and might forever. Amen.

I Timothy 6:11-16

Michelle Bosveld

THE TRINITY

The Year Nines as part of their studies in church history last year, spent some time studying the trinity. They dealt with topics such as the controversies in the early Christian church; how the church fathers fought against them; and how heresies continue to rear their heads today. Their final assessment task was an essay presenting these

issues. Merinda's essay summarized them well and is reprinted here.

The Trinity. Three in One. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Our

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THE TRINITY (continued)

human minds struggle to comprehend this puzzle. How can three be one and yet still be three? All throughout the ages, theologians have sought to find the answer to this obscurity. Our human minds cannot begin to understand this concept and so a lot of different ideas emerged from the search for the answer. As a result a lot of people have strayed from the truth. As humans, we cannot ever understand the Trinity. Yet, as true believers, we accept it as the truth, as we know in this life we will never be able to understand God. *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”* (Isaiah 55:8, 9 NIV).

We, as Christians believe as what the Belgic Confession states very clearly in Article 8. *“...We believe in one only God, who is one single essence, in which are three persons, really, truly and eternally distinct according to their incommunicable properties; namely, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father is the cause, origin, and beginning of all things visible and invisible. The Son is the Word, the wisdom and the image of the Father. The Holy Spirit is the eternal power and might who proceeds from the Father and the Son. Nevertheless, God is not by this distinction divided into three...these three persons are but only one God.”* (Article 8 of the Belgic Confession.) The Athanasian Creed is also an important document with regards to the doctrine of the Trinity. It states on the matter *“Now this is the catholic faith, that we worship one God in trinity and trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons, or dividing the substance. For the Father’s Person is one, the Son’s another, the Holy Spirit’s another; but the Godhead of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one, their glory is equal, their majesty is co-eternal. ... Thus the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but there is only one God.”* (Statements 3-6, 15-16 of the Athanasian Creed). Even though it is difficult to understand, we must accept this doctrine as true, or we stray from what the Bible teaches. As the Article 9 of the Belgic Confession puts

it: *“Although this doctrine far surpasses all human understanding, nevertheless in this life we believe it on the ground of the Word of God, and we expect to enjoy its perfect knowledge and fruit hereafter in heaven.”*

In the Old Testament, the Trinity was somewhat obscure, yet there were hints to its existence. In the very first book of the Bible — Genesis, it is revealed that there is more than one Person yet one God, but the number of persons is not given. I quote from chapter 1:26, 27 *“Then God said let Us make man in **Our** image, according to **Our** likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in **His** own image; in the image of God He created them.”* This use of plural forms clearly indicates more than one and yet one. The three Persons have all lived from eternity and will live to eternity, yet only God the Father revealed Himself to the Israelites in the Old Testament. God the Son and the God the Holy Spirit did not fully reveal themselves until in the New Testament.

The doctrine of the Trinity has been questioned and puzzled over ever since the early church. One of the first attacks was carried out by the Jews. They sought to kill Jesus for they did not believe that He was the Son of God. The idea was offensive to them.

The Roman Empire particularly had difficulties with the doctrine of the Trinity. A man called “Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus” or simply Tertullian (155-230 AD) was a church leader and successful writer. He was a forerunner of the Nicene Creed, and wrote a lot about the Trinity as we believe it. He stated that God was three Persons but yet one Being. The Western part of the Roman Empire accepted this doctrine as true without too many problems. However the East had a big struggle with it. Thus, when Emperor Constantine (284-337 AD) tried to unify the Empire by making Christianity compulsory, he ran into major problems. This resulted in several councils being held to try

and compromise. Around this time many theories surrounding the Trinity were thought out and became widespread.

In 260 AD Paul of Samosota tried to disintegrate the doctrine of the Trinity by saying that Jesus was the adopted Son of God, and not a true son. Around 265, Sabellian claimed that there was only one God who presented Himself in different roles — first as the Father, then as the Son and then as the Holy Spirit. Sabellius was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church for his heresy. The Church opposed both of these heresies by using texts such as John 1:1-2 which reads as follows: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”* This verse counterattacks these heresies nicely. It clearly states that the Word – Jesus Christ – was in the beginning with God the Father. Therefore Christ must be eternal, and He must be the true Son of God. However both of these doctrines, influenced many people and stayed alive for many years.

One of Satan’s most powerful attacks on the doctrine of the Trinity — and the Church – came in the form of Arius’ heresies. Arius was an elder in the church at Alexandria and his doctrines influenced many and caused a lot of unrest. Arius could not accept the Trinity. It defied all logic, he claimed and so he rejected it. Instead he claimed that Christ was created, but He was created first and He was created out of nothing. He taught that Christ was not truly God’s Son, but only called so out of grace. Summed up, he believed Jesus was a finite being — a creature.

This doctrine robs us of our comfort. For how could a mere creature save us from our sin? Lord’s Day 5 deals with this effectively. Q and A 14 says: *“Can any mere creature pay for us? No. In the first place, God will not punish another creature for the sin which man has committed. Furthermore, no mere creature can sustain the burden of God’s eternal wrath against sin and deliver others from it.”* So if Arius’ doctrine was true, we would not be saved!

Countering Arius, God used Alexander who was a bishop in Alexandria. Alexander immediately called a synod in Alexandria in

the year 319. Arius doctrines were condemned as unscriptural at this synod. In spite of the synod’s findings, Arius continued preaching his false doctrine. Hostility soon arose between the two parties — even to the extent of street riots and shedding of blood.

It was around this time that Emperor Constantine began to try to unify the Roman Empire. He quickly tried to suppress Arius’ teachings. However, Arius resisted any compromise Constantine tried to put to him. So Constantine tried to establish peace by calling a council in 325. This was held in Nicea. The Emperor chaired the council. Arius defended his teachings and a great argument arose — even leading to physical fighting. Constantine realized that unity was not going to happen unless Arius went, and so he influenced the council to vote against Arius. Arius, as a result, was excommunicated from the church.

Even after the council at Nicea, peace was not restored. Arians and their opponents still battled continually. Constantine soon saw, that many in the east still clung to Arius’ teachings and that some opponents of Arius had changed their minds. Constantine decided to re-admit Arius into the church. In the meantime, Athanasius (293-373) succeeded Alexander as bishop in Alexandria. Athanasius, however, refused to reinstate Arius back into the church. Athanasius was then sent by Constantine to the west. Athanasius continued to resist Arius, from the west. The battle between the two leaders raged on. Another council was called in 381, where the same issues were discussed. At this council it became apparent that most of the church leaders once again supported the true doctrine — and so the Nicene Creed was written and adopted to refute Arius’ teachings. (The Athanasius Creed was also based on the teachings of Athanasius although Athanasius did not write it. The Athanasian Creed first appears in history in the first half of the sixth century, but the author remains unknown.) Arius and his teachings were banned from the church. Even though the banning did affect the spreading of these heresies, it did not altogether stop them.

THE TRINITY (continued)

Sadly, the doctrine of Arius is still apparent today. In particular, the Jehovah Witnesses support it. They state that it is illogical to have three in one. Therefore, they also reject that Christ rose from the dead and descended into heaven. In believing that they are robbed of their comfort for “*If Christ is not risen your faith is in vain*”. (1 Corinthians 15:17 NKJV).

Professor Berkhoff of the Dutch Hervomde church argues against our interpretation of the Trinity as well. He believes that when the Bible talks about the “sons of God” it means the Israelites who were sinful. So God sent a “good Son” to redeem His brothers and sisters. The Holy Spirit worked in this man Jesus, so He was worthy to be called God’s Son. The professor taught that the Father is Godly, the Son is human and the Spirit is the bond between the two. This doctrine is also wrong. In John 8, Jesus talks a lot about His Father. Jesus says in John 10:30 “*I and My Father are one.*”

The Trinity is something we will never fully understand until we live in perfectness in eternity. We believe that like the Father, the Son and the Spirit are both God. All three are

almighty and eternal. All three are creators and upholders of heaven and earth. All three are perfectly wise and just, as well as good and the source of all blessings. We revere, trust and stand in awe of all three. Three in One. It’s something we’ll never understand, but we can always believe in.

Merinda Terpstra

RESOURCES:

NKJV

NIV

The Belgic Confession, de Bres, Guido, 1561

The Heidelberg Catechism, Ursinus, Zacharius;

Olevianus, Caspar; 1563

The Athanasian Creed, unknown author, 500-550 AD

The Nicene Creed, Council of Constantinople, 381

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertullian>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athanasius>

The ongoing Arian heresy, J Numan, Una Sancta volume 43 no. 14, 11/05/1996, Western Australia

The Nicene Creed, Youth Column, K. Bruning, Una Sancta volume 26 no.19, 17/7/1979, Western Australia

How do YOU dress?

How often do we think about the way we dress and portray ourselves? Is it often, and if yes, is it in a spiritual manner? How often do we come across texts in the Bible which mention and remind us of our dress standard? When I thought about writing this article, I found it hard to find texts relating to this issue. However, does that mean that we can just sort of put in to the back of our minds and not really think about the way we dress? I don’t think so, especially since it is written very clearly in 1 Tim 2:9-10 that “Women are to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.”

What does this text mean to you? What I understand from this is that women must

dress modestly and their appearance should be with decency. In other words, everyone should dress for the occasion. No woman, or man for that matter, should dress in a way which is meant to draw “unwanted” or uncalled-for attention to themselves.

I recently purchased a paperback called “Every Young Woman’s Battle” by Shannon Ethridge and Stephen Arterburn. While reading this book, I came across a section on “Dressing to Impress”, and I would like to share some of it with you. So here goes: ‘You teach people how to treat you. Either you teach them to treat you with respect or you teach them to treat you with disrespect. Whether you intend to or not, the way you dress – modestly covering the most visual stimulation parts of your body or immodestly

revealing as much of your body as you can get away with – sends others a message.’

Potential boyfriends and girlfriends will look at what you’re like on the inside, and how you believe and profess God as Lord, and not at the way you dress with skimpy tops and short skirts, and for guys, boxer shorts hanging half out your pants. Another quote (for the girls): ‘When you catch a young man’s eye, it will be because of the way you carry yourself with confidence and character, not because of your skimpy attire. The guy whose head you turn with your inward beauty will more than likely be a godly young man who could possibly make a great husband someday, not some Joe Schmo who just wants to use your body for his temporary pleasure.’

Is it really loving your neighbour as yourself if you wear immodest clothing, clothing that should probably only be worn around your husband/wife, not your boyfriend/girlfriend? It says in Matthew 22:39 that we are to “Love your neighbour as yourself”, and would you consider it thinking about others in a loving way when you get dressed thinking about “how many guys will I get looking at me today”? I personally think that it is not loving your neighbour as yourself, because you are thinking about yourself, and not about what it does to the person of the opposite sex.

One last quote out of this book “Every Young Woman’s Battle”. (It is worth a read by the way!!) This is spoken by a guy named Curtis,

who felt he could freely speak about what he would want in a girlfriend, so girls, take heed. “...I don’t want a girlfriend who exposes herself to other guys by dressing immodestly. I want a girl who I can respect and who will respect the fact that I want to guard my eyes against lusting after her body before we are married.” Doesn’t that say something? And guys, is that what you are looking for in a girl, or is it that you just want her for her body, and don’t really care if she shows it off to someone else?

To end this article, I would like to mention a small list for you to think about regarding your clothes...

- If someone is standing over you or if you are bending over, could that person get an eyeful of cleavage?
- Do your shirts reveal any part of your abdomen or back if you do the “hallelujah test” (lift your hands above your head)?
- Do any of your jeans or pants ride your hips so low that your underwear can be seen from the back?
- Do your skirts or shorts come above your thumbnail when your arms are at your side?

Clothed in righteousness, modesty, and dignity, you’ll be dressing to impress young men/women who are truly worth impressing.

Heidi Bergsma

SPYSC Meeting Report: 2005 AGM

The Social and Political Youth Study Club (SPYSC) held its 2005 Annual General Meeting on December 6 last year. At the meeting, guest speaker Richard ‘t Hart guided the attendees through the complex world of financial markets as part of his presentation on ‘Financial Market Cents’.

Richard explained that within the economy there are different types of markets, each having their own function. The most common financial market, the stock market,

allows not only shares but also options, rights and debt securities to be traded. Currency (such as the Australian dollar) is traded on money markets while goods (such as oil, cattle or gold for instance) are traded on commodity markets. Indexes (such as the All Ordinaries, the Dow Jones and the FTSE) function as a benchmarking mechanism through which the performance of markets can be measured.

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SPYSC (continued)

There are many advantages to investing in shares; they have high liquidity (meaning that they can be bought and sold more quickly than, say, an investment property), have low entry and trading costs, can easily be diversified and have the potential for good long-term growth. However, investment decisions must be made carefully since share prices can be volatile in the short-term. Good research and analysis of a company's future profitability is essential to share trading.

Financial markets can be considered a blessing in many ways as they allow for efficient trading and also spread risk. This was illustrated at a global level during hurricane Katrina last year. As a result of the hurricane much of the United States' oil pumping and distribution infrastructure was put out of action. If the United States had to rely solely on its own oil sources during this period oil prices in that country would have skyrocketed. But, due to international oil trading facilitated by global markets, the United States could purchase oil from overseas. Like all blessings, however, financial markets too can be used and abused and they are often sites of greed. As Christians we need to place our trust for lasting happiness and security in God.

During the meeting there was considerable discussion about if and how Christians should invest, particularly in the stock market. Like other investments, including real estate, share investments must be made on the basis of good research. Just because a housing or share market has boomed in the past is no guarantee that this will continue unabated in the future. When investing in shares we should not gamble but maintain a responsible level of risk, although there will be (and was!) debate about what level of risk is acceptable. And, as responsible stewards, we may not invest money in a manner that is beyond our means or at the expense of our other financial commitments.

There are also companies that we should not invest in because they engage in activities that conflict with God's Word. Whilst this is clear-

cut in some cases, other companies are difficult to assess. Drug companies, for example, produce beneficial medication but may also manufacture abortion drugs. Unfortunately, there are also situations (superannuation funds in particular) in which we have very little control over where our money is invested.

However, investing in a Christian manner can also be pro-active. While the aim of investing is to produce a profit, we can choose to invest our money and profit from things that benefit society rather than break it down. Dr Fiona Wood's company Clinical Cell Culture, for instance, provides a definite social benefit and (providing of course that the financial merits of the company are properly researched and analysed) could be a more worthy target for investment than Publishing and Broadcasting Ltd, which owns casinos.

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Looking back over the past year, we are thankful for all that SPYSC was allowed to accomplish. In February we could publish a guide for the 2005 WA state election. We had a study meeting, and were also privileged to hear well-researched presentations about student unionism as well as the environment. For our annual outing we toured *The West Australian* production complex.

At the AGM Diana Huizinga and Ben Schoof were elected to the SPYSC committee, replacing previous committee members Owen Mulder and Rose Vermeulen. We sincerely thank Owen and Rose for their involvement, and wish both of you God's blessings for the future.

We look forward to studying social and political issues in the light of scripture and confessions with you once again this year. As committee we will endeavour to find topics that are relevant and (we hope) engaging. Keep an eye out for notices in the (metropolitan) *District Bulletin*, or alternatively register to receive email updates by sending a message to spysc@frca.org.au

Laurence Van der Plas

**To those who see.
What do you notice? Who do you
set your eyes on?**

The leaves on the tree are orangey-brown. "Look at the orange on those leaves," you observe. "That's dieback," I reply simply.

You admire the colours of the leaves and imagine how you would paint them, unaware of the plant disease, dieback.

I notice the effect of the disease on the trees – the loss of foliage and its colour. I also love to identify trees, but especially all the birds.

You see colours, light, and shadows. You want to capture it with a camera.

You notice things that need fixing.

Your attention is drawn to buildings and whether they comply with current regulations.

Or simply, you want to see if it's a good shed.

You notice things that remind you of people.

You see what's in the distance – landscapes and the big picture.

Yes? No?

What do you notice?

What glasses of fascination do you wear? Do you notice birds or buildings? Flowers or fabric? Culture or concrete? Shadows or shapes? Landscapes or lizards? Would you call yourself a painter? Artist? Biologist? Bird-watcher? Builder? People-

person? Mr or Ms Fix-it? Your vision and what catches your eye is unique.

Your glasses – where did you get them and do you acknowledge and advertise the source? When you are born you are already wearing glasses of fascination. Every single one of you is unique, special, and so is your fascination.

Are your glasses homemade or custom-made?

Built only for now or for eternity?
Glasses of humanity or grace?

Glasses of fascination fashioned by humanity provide a satisfactory vision that may inspire millions and achieve many things. But these glasses of humanity are temporary and misleading. Without grace, without God, life is without light, and eternity is anything but fascinating.

Glasses of God's grace come without a price but you must learn to use them. Through glasses of grace you see the light that will not fade or disappear on the day of Christ's return. Glasses that see beauty and riches in Christ. Jesus said "I am the Light of the world". Worship Him. Glory in the Light.

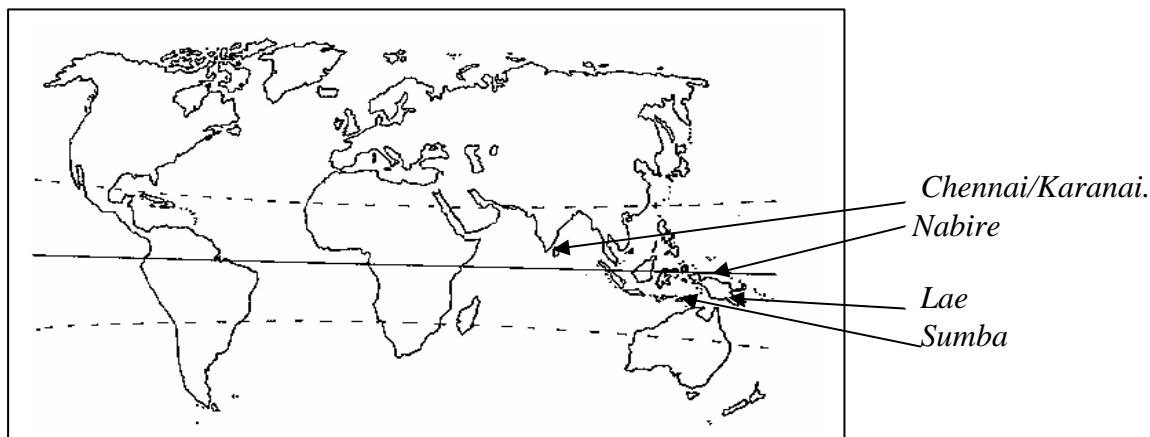
Today use your unique vision and glasses of fascination (and God's grace) to worship and praise the Lord.

Jacinta Pleiter

Thank you to those who have shared their glasses of fascination with me.

Keep sharing your glasses and join in the discovery. Share with the Contender what draws your attention, what you notice, and how the glasses of God's grace enlighten your ways.

ON A MISSION



On the map you'll notice a number of names. Those are the places which have received attention in Contender's "On a Mission."

In a country not far from ours there lives about 4500 fellow reformed believers about whom we hear from time to time. Today's "on a Mission" tells us a little more about the Reformed Church situation in Indonesia...

A Tour of Eastern Sumba

Visiting Eastern Sumba, and our sister churches there, can be a fantastic experience! It takes just a short airplane trip from Denpasar (Bali) to Waingapu (capital of East Sumba). ... That is, if you can catch the plane. The flight services are not always reliable! Well, that's what my experience was in October 2005.

As FRCA we are sister churches with the GGRI (Gereja² Reformasi Indonesia) - Reformed Churches of Indonesia. These churches are in West Kalimantan, Irian Jaya, and the NTT province (Nusa Tenggara Timur - Eastern lower Sunda islands). The NTT province includes West Timor, Rote, Sabu and Sumba. We have sister churches in West Timor, Sabu island, and East Sumba. The GGRC churches or Reformed Calvinist churches, (similar to the GGRI), are found in West Timor, Rote and Sabu. (Note: We don't have sister churches in East Timor or West Sumba).

The number of churches in East Sumba is amazing! As a new visitor to Sumba, the sheer

number of congregations was a surprise. They were fairly well spread over a large area of Eastern Sumba. Certainly, some churches and mission post branches are quite small. However, it is understandable that a small mission church branch forms in a place which is over 10 km away from the nearest church. After all, few people in our sister churches have a form of transport - not many own a motorbike, and owning a car is rare.

For some people a visit to church on Sunday may mean an 8 km walk one-way, in the mountains, and an 8 km return trip. Most of the churches in Sumba have one church service and one Sunday school/Catechism lesson time on Sundays. The Sunday School and Catechism lessons are often held before or after the church service. This reduces travel time for the people who live far away, and conserves energy for little children who often find the long walk tiring. Many church members know a number of Psalms fairly well, and Psalms are often sung in the church services - sometimes with a guitar to accompany the singing. However, obtaining

new Psalm books can be difficult, as there is no bookshop.

The churches in East Sumba include 14 instituted churches. Another two will hopefully be instituted by the end of December 2005. Together, these churches support about 40 branches or mission post churches. In total, this means there are over 50 congregations in East Sumba. About 11 mission posts have 50 members or less. About 17 branches or mission posts have 50-100 church members. About 15 churches and mission post branches have 100-200 members. About four churches have 200+ members. The statistics on some of the churches were not available. In total, this means that there are just over 5000 members of the GGRI in NTT, and about 4500 of these members live in East Sumba!

The churches in East Sumba are divided into three classis. There is a Coastal Classis, an Eastern Mountains Classis, and another (west) Mountains Classis. Synods are usually held every two years. This facilitates communication in an area where transport, electricity and telephone connections are very difficult. Outside of the city of Waingapu, very few places have a telephone or electricity – or have a reliable supply of electricity. No-one has internet or email services ‘at home’. A postal service is only available in the city.

Communication between people and churches is very tricky, and can be haphazard or limited. It often relies on walking, hiring a motorbike, or taking ‘public transport’ for long distances. That can become expensive. The roads are also full of potholes in most areas, so most forms of transport provide a slow and ‘bone-shaking’ experience. Difficulties in communication, as well as poverty often slows down progress in relations between churches and sister churches. Yes, poverty?! If people do not have the money or income to pay for the transport, for postage, or to go and make a telephone call, then it does not happen!

At the moment there are only 11 trained, active ministers in Sumba. These ministers serve the 14-16 established churches, over 40

branches or mission posts, and about 4500 church members! The (west) Mountains Classis has no fully trained ministers, although some evangelists and retired ministers do live there. It is also a very poor area, with a limited water supply (many wells are dry for 6 months each year), limited health care, and a high rate of disease and infection.

For the past approximately seven years, the theological college in Wai Marangu, in Eastern Sumba, has not been functioning to full capacity. It has only been used for meetings and courses – not for proper theological training. It is a bit run-down. Most student ministers have gone to Java for further theological studies – ie. Bandung or Jakarta. After returning to Sumba they receive tuition or training with a Reformed minister there, until they ‘pass’.

There is a great need for Reformed theological training and more ministers in Sumba. However, only 10-15% of students in the churches graduate from Senior High School (Year 12), and there are only three areas with a Senior High School in Eastern Sumba. Thus there are very few church members who are able to go on to further education or tertiary studies.

Despite this, the work of our Dutch sister churches in Sumba, in the past, has led to much strong growth in faith.

During my time in Sumba, with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, it was wonderful to experience a strong commitment to serving the Lord, and sharing the Gospel in a Biblical, Reformed manner – with good teaching of the Word of God and confessions. In some villages people from more evangelical churches are leaving to join the Reformed Churches! They realise that the depth of Bible teaching and faith is important, and that the confessions help to guard against heresies, and to teach God’s Word carefully. It was a blessing to share our Reformed heritage and common unity in the covenant of grace – in a different language, in a ‘third-world country’ area!

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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