

Christmas

As we stand on the verge of Christmas 2008, it seems not that long ago that we were celebrating Christmas 2007, or even Christmas 2006 for that matter. In 2009 we will also celebrate Christmas and in 2010 we will go through all the festivities of Christmas again. And whilst the Christmas period is generally characterised by holiday time, family get-togethers, beach outings and barbeques, nevertheless there is a certain monotony when year in, year out we observe Christmas. On December 25 Christians will go to church to listen to the message of Christmas before engaging in some good food and wine. Last year it was the same, and the year before that, and next year there is no reason to expect that it will be any different. In town, shops and businesses are promoting the idea of peace and goodwill to all men through the means of lavish gifts and presents, just as they have been doing for quite a few years now, and will likely continue to do so in the years to come.

The annual celebration of Christmas Day can become somewhat tedious when it is observed outside the perspective of God's plan. In fact it is not dissimilar to what the preacher observes in the book of Ecclesiastes. “‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher ‘all is vanity’...

Volume 13	Issue 8	December 2008	
Editorial: Christmas	E Terpstra	1	
Hello & Welcome	E Terpstra	3	
The Tapestry	H Muilenburg	3	
Racial Difference	N Spaanderman	4	
Long Road to Heaven	M Terpstra	5	
Blanket	K Wagenaar	6	
The Meaningless of Work	J Pleiter	7	

Christmas (continued)

That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun." (Ecc.1:2,9) The Preacher in this book is struggling to come to terms with the endless cycles of life, especially as they appear in nature. He also wonders at the purpose of life which seems to involve constant work, and results in the death and burial of a person. In this day and age, Christmas is for some people a bitter struggle. They struggle with questions such as the preacher does, and without hope and without joy some will look for a way out of life to end their problems.

The Preacher of Ecclesiastes though, is no such person. In fact he writes in chapter 3, *"To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven."* What follows are fourteen examples of a season for doing one thing, followed by a season of doing the opposite. Is this vanity? It may appear this way, but a quick examination of the examples reveals that in life balance is important. Life would be quite miserable if we experienced death without also experiencing new life, if we could only plant and never harvest, or if we could only mourn without having the opportunity to laugh also.

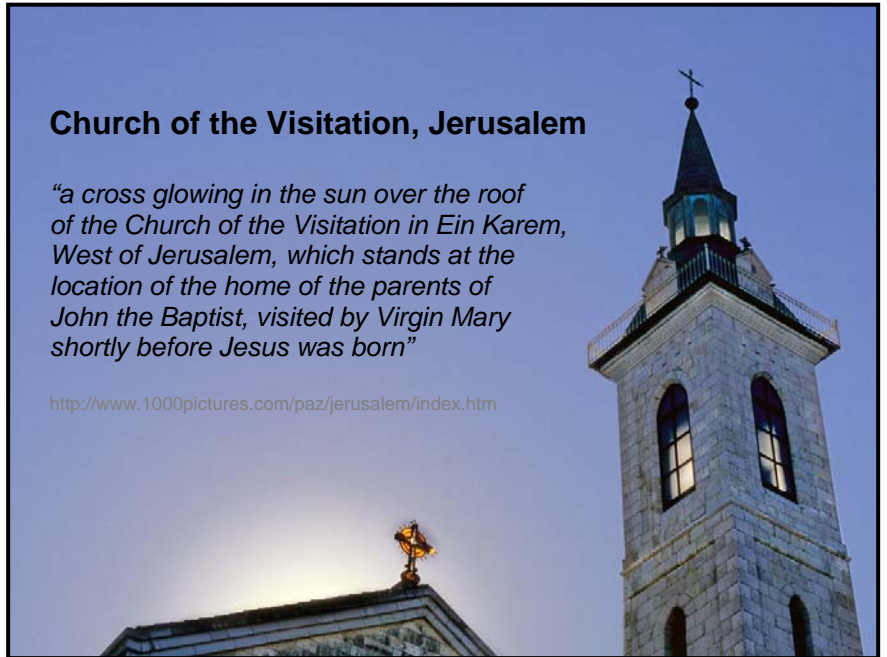
Is it vanity then to be celebrating Christmas each year again? Is it appropriate to keep celebrating it when for the last umpteen years we have been busy with this tradition? It was noted that balance was important. When we celebrate Christmas, we celebrate it in the context of the complete redeeming work of Christ. Rather than a recurring event of merriment and fun, Christmas is balanced by Easter, each year unfolding closer and closer to God's fulfilment of the plan of salvation.

In the Old Testament God's people Israel brought many sacrifices for the atonement of sins, which could never take away sin, but

Church of the Visitation, Jerusalem

"a cross glowing in the sun over the roof of the Church of the Visitation in Ein Karem, West of Jerusalem, which stands at the location of the home of the parents of John the Baptist, visited by Virgin Mary shortly before Jesus was born"

<http://www.1000pictures.com/paz/jerusalem/index.htm>



which pointed to the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were repetitive, but they were necessary, for it kept their focus on the need for a complete Saviour. In the meantime God's plan for complete and full atonement was slowly being worked out, until it was completed by Christ's death on the cross. The Lord's plan of redemption is not yet finalised, for we live in a time of expectancy, when we wait for Christ's Second Coming.

In Ecclesiastes 3:11 we read, *"He (the Lord God) has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end."* In those endless cycles of nature, the Preacher observes that God does make everything beautiful in its time. We too recognise it, for example in the growth of a flower, and not just one, but hundreds of different species all over the world, in different sizes and colours and shape and form. We also observe it in the growth of an infant to an adult, not just in physical characteristics, but also in mental development and response. All around us, and in our very own lives, we are able to observe God's work amongst us. It is special and it is a delight.

The work that God is still busy with, and which we await, is the restoration of Paradise. It includes a complete restoration of the broken relationship between man and His God. *"He has*

put eternity into their hearts..." As opposed to animals, mankind is able to look beyond the existence of this short life, to a better eternal life. How the Lord works out this plan is kept hidden from us. What is clear however is at that time, when in the twinkling of an eye we will be changed, the filthy rags of sin and shame will be replaced with heavenly gowns of glory and splendor. In time God will also make us beautiful in His sight.

When celebrating Christmas from the perspective of God's eternal plan it is not a monotonous or tedious event to observe each year again. Instead we celebrate a milestone in God's plan of redemption, knowing that we too may be a part of His eternal plan as God works toward the Final Day. At Christmas, this year, we can celebrate because God's eternal plan has progressed another 12 months. And if by Christmas 2009 the Final Day still has not arrived, we can celebrate again because we will be another year closer to His return. Annual celebrations such as Christmas are necessary, for they focus our direction to God's eternal plan for our lives.

Eric Terpstra

THE TAPESTRY

In the tapestry of life
The picture is obscure
The colours look mismatched
The threads seem insecure.
We can't understand the pattern
Or number every strand
We do not know the reason
For all that God has planned.
We only see the back
Of life's embroidered picture.
God knows its entirety
He is the Master Stitcher.

Heidi Muilenburg

Welcome to your final edition of Contender for 2008

Another year is nearly at an end, yes we have moved one year closer to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the past year the Lord has continued to bless us with freedom to write and publish Christian literature. It is something we don't take for granted, and we also hope and pray that as young people you find the material that is published both interesting and spiritually up-building.

In this edition we have paid some attention to Christmas and the relevance of continually year after year observing this Christian event. Further, there are a couple of other interesting articles written by young people, concerning our attitude to other races of people and the impressions that we as Australians give to them. It does give us things to think about especially when many of us do travel and holiday in foreign places.

We welcome on the editorial committee Katie Wagenaar, from the church of Darling Downs. She is a replacement for Colette Groenewold. She has been "write" into the art of producing articles and shares some thoughts in this edition. We look forward to more!!

Finally, you will notice in this magazine an advertisement for an upcoming wedding. During the course of the holiday period, two of our editors will be married to each other. We hope to be able to welcome back next year Mr and Mrs B and R Pitlo (nee VanderWal). Brendan and Rita, we wish you a most enjoyable wedding day and the Lords blessings on your marriage.

*That's all from me, enjoy the read as well as the holidays,
Eric*

RACIAL DIFFERENCE

Racial difference has been the cause of oppression and conflict in many parts of the world. We only need to look at the 20th Century to see Apartheid in South Africa, slavery in America and the Stolen Generations in Australia. And even years after these have ended the legacy of racial discrimination remains. As Christians we know from God's Word that racism and the domination of one race over another is wrong. Every human being on this earth has been created in God's image (Genesis 1: 27) and we are therefore all equally important in his eyes. At the same time God has made no distinctions in scripture between different races. Instead he commands us to proclaim the gospel to all peoples and nations. (Matthew 28:19).

However, interestingly enough a lecturer recently pointed out that Apartheid in South Africa was justified not only through science and Social Darwinism but also theologically. 'Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants He shall be to his brethren.' (Genesis 9:25) Canaan was dark skinned and this verse was therefore interpreted to support the segregation and oppression of dark people during Apartheid. We can tell from elsewhere in God's word that this is an incorrect interpretation of this verse. God did curse Canaan but he cursed the nation of Canaan, rather than a particular race based on the colour of skin. While racism as a belief in the inferiority of a people due to the colour of their skin is obviously outdated and is not based on any scientific proof, racist attitudes still do exist in society today. The

purpose of this article is to discuss how we as Christians should have a different attitude than the world around us towards people of different races.

Over the last few decades, the world including Australian society has progressed in its attitudes towards racial discrimination. The end of and investigation into the Stolen Generations after 1970, reveals a shift in the way we perceive the Indigenous peoples of Australia. An important step was made earlier this year when the Prime Minister apologised on behalf of Australian society for years of domination and oppression. While this is an important step the reason behind our 'anti-racist' attitude must be different from that of the world. Formerly scientific racism established that races could be classified from superior to inferior and that many 'inferior races' would eventually die out. However, the world now recognises through science and other social studies that there is no such thing as an 'inferior race'. Rather, there is very little genetic difference between different coloured people.

It is true that God does not directly mention race in His Word but he does not encourage racism or the domination of one race over another. Instead, His Word teaches us that we are created in His image. (Genesis 1: 27) In this life we can only begin to understand and appreciate the majesty and glory of God but we do know that it is indeed a great honour to be created in His image. There is no doubt that this is one of the teachings of scripture and therefore it follows that it is wrong for us to look down on different races or make and join in with racist joke or comments. Everyone is equal in the eyes of God, no matter what the colour of the skin or their racial background.

It is not the purpose of this article to judge past governments and colonists but it is important for us to remember that the

"For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever."
Romans 11:36

With thankfulness to our Heavenly Father, Who has guided our lives together, we

Rita Jayne VanderWal
and
Brendan Hendrikus Pitlo

together with our parents, invite you to share in our happiness and witness the occasion of our marriage, which will take place, the Lord willing, on
Saturday, the 31st of January 2009 at 1:00pm in the
Free Reformed Church of Byford, Rev VanderJagt officiating.

Please join us for light refreshments after the ceremony until 3:00pm

Future Address: 32 Challis Road. Armadale WA 6112

legacy of racial discrimination remains today. Unemployment for Indigenous peoples is high, life expectancy and the living conditions of many remain below that of white citizens. At the same time countless Indigenous people are still struggling to find their families and their place in Australian society. Another legacy of racism is that while some Indigenous Australians have fought for equal rights and celebrated the colour of their skin, others are self-conscious of it and perceive themselves as inferior. This issue is very complex and I have only touched on it here but my purpose is to highlight why Indigenous Australians need our compassion and more importantly the gospel.

I realise that it is easy for us to think negatively about the Indigenous people that live in Australian society today. Sometime they do not impress us with their attitudes or actions but this does not mean that we can treat them as if they are below us. They have been deeply affected by years of discrimination and through the colonisation of Australia they have lost their culture, land and religion.

However we know that the gospel of Christ offers true healing for them. In John 4: 9 – 10 we read about Jesus asking for a drink from a Samaritan woman. The Samaritans were despised because they were a mixed race but Jesus did not discriminate on the basis of race or nationality.

Rather he began proclaiming the gospel of Christ to her. Maybe we as churches should look at doing mission work within Australia, so that we may bring the gospel to the Indigenous peoples. For many of the Indigenous people have no hope or meaning in life and this is why it is so important that we reach out to them with the gospel.

It is very difficult because the current situation of society is such that we don't often come into contact with Indigenous peoples and thus we do not have many opportunities to talk to them. At the same time, the former religion that Indigenous people believed in is very different from that of our Free Reformed belief. Therefore it is a complicated issue but God's Word is very clear on this topic and if we have the chance to show them God's glorious message and love then we must take the opportunity.

Natika Spaanderman

A. Haebich, *For their own Good: Aborigines and Government in the South West of Western Australia 1900 – 1940*, Nedlands, 1992, p. 156.

Australian Human Rights Commission, 'A Statistical Overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia', <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/Social_Justice/statistics/idx.html#toc41>, 2006.

Australian Human Rights Commission, 'Consequences of Removal', <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/Social_Justice/statistics/idx.html#toc41>, 2006.

LONG ROAD TO HEAVEN

Based on a section of a larger research assignment on the topic of Indonesian perceptions of Australians

The past sixty years since Indonesia's Independence have seen the relationship between Australia and Indonesia experience both good and bad times. One recent high point of this relationship involved Australia and Indonesia working together to give aid to Aceh after the 2004 tsunami. Recent low points include the ongoing capture of traditional Indonesian fishermen in Australian waters, the 2002 Bali bombings and the cases of Schapelle Corby and the Bali Nine. Currently, Australia's stance on the death penalty threatens our relationship. These low points, says Australian journalist Mike Carlton

(2008), are characterized by 'bizarre misunderstandings' between the two nations.

These misunderstandings occur both at the level of the general public, and also within government organizations. Reeve (2006) notes that in an interview with Indonesian ambassador Imron Cotan, it was revealed that of 6000 applicants for diplomatic positions in 2003, about 95% of the applicants had strongly anti-Australian views. Many of these views were based on perceived Australian arrogance in its dealings with Indonesia.

Since the relationship we have with Indonesia is important, it is time to consider the image we as Australians are projecting to our neighbour country. One issue of particular importance is the image given across by Australians in Bali. 'Long Road to Heaven' (Higgs & Leng Wai & Logam-Tan, 2006), a controversial Indonesian film about the Bali bombings of 2002, illustrates this well.

This film takes the perspective of Amrozi, Samudra and Mukhlas to consider the reasons behind the bombings, and uses other characters to illustrate the different Australian reactions to the bombings. The film begins with a Bali night scene. A young Muslim Indonesian man enters a small deli. Walking around, he encounters an Australian man coming away from the fridge, his shopping basket nearly full with Bintang Beer. Disgusted, he steps outside only to be confronted with more drunk Australians staggering along the sidewalk. Returning to his car where his brother awaits, the two men drive through Bali, past pubs and night clubs where Australian and other tourists drink alcohol, flaunt their bodies and their wealth, and pay no heed to Indonesian culture.

These scenes, according to 'Long Road to Heaven' are what caused Bali to be chosen as the target for the 2002 bombings. The bombers saw the Australian tourists as infidels, disrespecting their culture and sinning against Allah. Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, an Indonesian Muslim cleric, reinforces this claim in an interview with Mike Carlton by stating that America and Australia are 'criminals' for fighting terrorism (Hilton & Richards, 2008). The Bali bombers, he claimed, were merely defending the Islamic faith and community.

Of course, this is just one film, and one opinion. There are others. Further, there is no excuse for terrorism. In no way do I defend these bombers or their actions. However, this film certainly gives

us as Australians something to consider, and something to work with. It is also meaningful to us as Free Reformed people, since so many of us visit or have visited Bali. It is not my intent, nor even my place, to tell anyone how to act in Bali. Instead, I would like to share a lesson I learnt during my recent six-month stay in Indonesia.

When I first arrived there I was unsure of how I would be viewed by the Indonesian people; however I quickly learned that respect breeds respect. When my house mates and uni friends understood that I respected their culture and way of life, they also came to respect me and my way of life. In the end, it was largely through these friends that I came to have a deeper understanding of the Indonesian culture. I was also able to share with them some elements of Australian culture, and could even discuss the differences between my faith and theirs.

In conclusion, I urge readers to visit Indonesia with the view of getting to know the Indonesian people and to understand their culture. I also urge anyone who does visit Indonesia to respect Indonesian cultural norms, and to reflect our Godly way of life both in the way we behave as well as the way we deal with the Indonesian people.

Miriam Terpstra

References:

- Higgs, L. (Producer), & Leng Wai, W., Logam-Tan, A (Writers), & Sinaro, E (Director). (2006). Long Road to Heaven [Motion Picture]. Indonesia: Kalyana Shira Films.
- Hilton, C. (Producer), & Richards, D (Writer/Director). (2008). Indonesia: A Reporter's Journey [Motion picture]. Australia: Essential Viewing.
- Kitley, P., Chauvel, R., Reeve, D. (Eds.). (1989). *Australia di Mata Indonesia*. Jakarta: Penerbit Gramedia.
- Reeve, D. (2006). Strange, Suspicious Packages. In J. Monfries (Ed.), *Different Societies, Shared Futures* (pp. 69-83). Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Publications.

BLANKET

Sometimes I think we forget *who we are*. Yes perhaps that sounds like a corny line from a film like 'The Lion King'. But in all seriousness it is something to think about. We live in world with a very materialistic focus. I even just mentioned that I thought I was talking about a movie, one that

most of us have watched, which just proves how our minds tend to work around this same focus.

Our minds also work constantly around what we are doing in our lives. For example whether we are studying at school, or laying bricks, or hanging

out with friends, and the list is endless. Yes, I know these things are not wrong, for God has told us to work on this earth (Genesis) and also to enjoy life (Ecclesiastes). But our lives here in Australia are so free and easy, which is one of the devil's best war tactics. He gives us easy lives so that we can easily forget about who we truly are.

Yes I'm back to the 'who we are' thing. If we were to stop our studying, laying or hanging for just one second, and find some space in our brains to think about who we are... what would you come up with?

Here's what a space in my brain would come up with: I am a child of God, I am here on this earth because of Him, I am alive to worship and praise Him and one day I am going to be with Him in heaven!

Wow! What a thought! It sure blows away all those other ones! Just remembering that I am not here for NO good reason, but because I am God's child - it really helps put perspective on things, even if for just a second... and hey, that one second is definitely a better way to start than going the whole day without!

Now you are probably wondering why I called this article 'Blanket'. Well, it refers to an analogy I'd like to tell you. Remember when I speak of an analogy this does not necessarily mean I will hit on every part of Christian life, but just one or two parts. So please do not criticise this as missing something! Anyway here goes...

God has covered our lives with a blanket; the blanket equals being a child of the Triune God. Seeing the world through this blanket

helps us to see what is wrong and what is pleasing to Him. I don't know about you but sometimes I tend to peak out from under the covers, FORGETTING WHO I AM, and I look at the world in a different way. I become materialistic, I take things for granted, I push myself into thinking certain movies or books are okay to watch or read. I drink too much, I go to places that I trick myself into thinking are okay, I also... well I think you get the idea and perhaps the rest of the list can be filled out by you?

The point is: DON'T peak out from those covers! Remember who you are and pray for the Holy Spirit to help you remember more often so that the blanket stays there as a protection from that cold and only passing world!

Katie Wagenaar

The Meaningless of Work

I had put my hand to working, my days to benefit the world;
Hours of effort to improve, to increase, and to do well.

I had free time, day after day, searching for value
In work, in duties, in helping others, and in good things.

I sought value in company and doing worthwhile things.
I thought my mood would improve, that things will look better.

I saw no end, I saw no value, I felt no good, my work unhelpful.
Finally I crashed, crying, lonely, worthless, exhausted.
I cried out to God. "Why do I feel so worthless?
Why do things not satisfy, nor people who care?"

It was He who let me cry, the LORD who dried my eyes.
"My child, you're safe. My child, I'm here. Rest in Me.

"No earthly thing, no work, no person, no hobby, nothing;
No one but I can satisfy. Rest in Me, in Me alone.

"To Me you are valued, you are loved, you are Mine.
Take time to rest in My presence, My Word, My psalms.

"Remember I AM and there is no other.
I AM and you are Mine and I love you.
Remember I AM and there is no other.
I AM. Rest in Me, in Me alone."

Jacinta Pleiter

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.

Editorial Board:	Eric Terpstra (EIC)
Joel Bosveld	Brendan Pitlo
Ben Schoof	Julian Slobe
Rita VanderWal	Katie Wagenaar

Layout: Rosanne Torenvliet

Editorial Address:
eherpstra@westnet.com.au

Article Deadline for Next Issue:
Next Issue Distributed: