



CONTENDER

International Cooperation

This edition of the Contender is an international collaboration. Brothers and sisters from the Netherlands and South Africa have provided us with articles dealing with issues, which they have to deal with or face in various forms. While on the one hand we see similarities to our situations, there are also contextual differences. Yet in the middle of these differences is the desire to submit completely to Jesus Christ and to seek solutions based on Scripture and Reformed principles. Quite a refreshing thought in today's man centred world.

This is the second international edition and we hope that you will enjoy, and be challenged by, the articles. For some of the editors this involves a considerable amount of work. Contact in different languages presents its challenges and when an article needs translation, all sorts of interesting grammatical quirks step in. We are thankful for the work that the different translators have done and while we have made minor changes we have tried to maintain the author's style. For some articles this

makes for awkward reading and some articles will require a little more work to comprehend, but they will be worth the effort.

The book review on "Deadline" was too long to put into one edition, so part two will be coming in the next edition. The authorial license taken by Randy Alcorn raises questions in itself. Does he in fact go too far, when he writes about what is hidden from us? Are we allowed to take such liberties?

We trust that you will enjoy this edition and we hope that this will be one of many different international editions.

■ **Mick ten Haaf**

We have the pleasure of adding Bruce Huizinga to the editorial team of the Contender. We trust that he will enjoy his task and find it stimulating. Thank you Bruce for your willingness to join us and share the load.

The editors.

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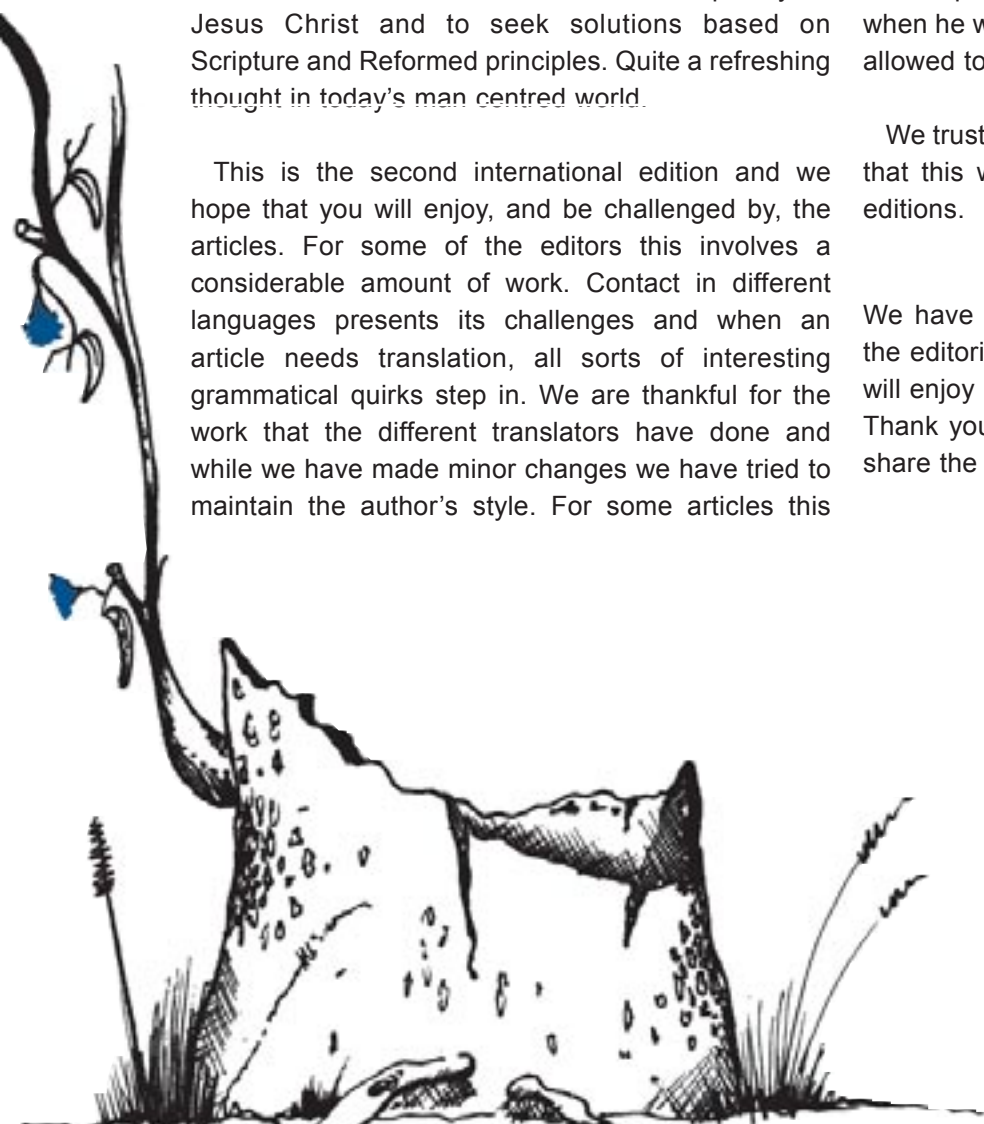
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**MAGAZINE FOR THE YOUTH OF THE
FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA**

A Choice for God's People

'Nowhere else than in the riddle/question of the Middle East it appears that the questions about Christ-and-his-church are of current-global meaning' (prof. J. Kamphuis)

Wherever we might live on earth, the news from Israel pushes toward us: violence, bomb outrage, youth who throw stones, people who hate each other. And if all those portraits, photos and reports don't make us think, then the conversations about it will. We meet people who strongly resist the military actions of Israel since Good Friday, but we also meet people who strongly agree. I don't want to mention all the events in order to comment on them in this article. However, I do want to state the question concerning in which way we, as Christians, have to look at the events in Israel.

Immediately we are confronted with Christians who have a clear point of view about what is currently happening in Israel. Based on their interpretation of the Bible, they think that Israel is the People of God that is being attacked by the enemies of God. The Palestinians, whipped up by the Islamite belief, are doing everything they have to, to make the state of Israel disappear. Christians like this see clear signs of the end of time in these current events. At the end of time the 'camp of the saints and the beloved city' will be surrounded by all nations, with Satan as the great instigator, won't it (Rev. 20:9)? And isn't the state of Israel the condition for a huge conversion that will yet come during the Jews, just before Christ returns? That's the reason for the prayers for Israel and the financial actions to get as many Jews as possible to return to Israel. That's the reason for all the keen warnings and the disapproval you get when you look at the conflict in a different way.

I don't think anyone - believing or not - can look neutrally at the situation in Israel. The rest of the world is too much involved for that. Business in weapons, strategic interests, diplomatic missions and the battle against fundamentalist violence affect every country in the world. If not this, then people will be touched by history: by the horrible murder of 6 million Jews during WWII, by the intrigues of the Western countries round the partition of Palestine, by the sad situation of the Palestinian people.

For Christians something else comes up. Israel and the Palestinian areas form the land where the Lord Jesus lived. Many places we have seen on television, we know from the Bible. Also the Jewish people have a special place in our hearts. Descendants of Abraham, they are 'beloved' because of the choice God made to let the Messiah be born out of Abraham and the Jews (Roman 11:28b). Because of that we have to be alert for arguments that are used when Christians, based on the Bible, say that Israel is God's nation and that every Christian has the duty to make a clear choice: for Israel and against the Palestinians.

For, as scriptural as they sound, those arguments show a misunderstanding of the work that Jesus Christ is doing in this world, His work of peace. The Lord Jesus made peace with God by dying on the cross for His sinful people. And after that He cancelled the distinction between Jews and heathens. This last thing is also a work of peace, as we can read in Eph. 2: 11-22. Here Paul says that we have to think about the fact that we didn't have the civil rights of Israel and that because of that we were in this

world without promises, without hope and without God. The salvation that the Lord promised through Adam to all people, ran by way of the narrow track of the people of Israel for centuries. To this nation He gave his commandments (Ps. 147: 19, 20). And other nations - us! - were his enemies. To us Paul says: "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation." (Eph. 2: 13, 14).

That is why we don't make a good choice when we use the name, 'People of God' to raise the first side above the other when discussing the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Christians who do that make three serious mistakes.

First, they use the term 'People of God' differently to the Bible. John the Baptist and Paul, both Jews, teach us that we may never use the title, 'people of God' without connection to faith in Jesus Christ. "God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones," John the Baptist said (Matt. 3: 9). Therefore Paul could say about the Jews: "But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children, because they are the seed of Abraham; but, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called'. That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed". The promise of the covenant is that all people who believe are God's children, and not only those who are from Abraham.

A second mistake that many Christians make when they isolate Israel as the people of God, is that they ignore their Palestinian brothers and sisters. Are Palestinians who accept Christ less than Jews who reject Christ? Often it seems like it!

Finally, we would put aside the work Jesus Christ did for His church if we point out Israel as the people of God. We believe that the church is the communion of Saints, the meeting of people who are justified and sacred (= put aside). The Lord gave that church enormous promises. In this way the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians hits us as well. Is Israel the nation of God and is there besides that a church too? Can Jesus Christ return today or tomorrow or next week or is that not possible before the Jewish people are converted first? Are God's covenant promises for the people who are from Abraham or are we, through faith, those descendants of Abraham?

God didn't just put Israel aside and exchange her for the church. We don't believe that Israel is replaced by the church. That is often the blunt reproach of Christians who give Israel, as a nation, a special place next to or in the church. But that critique is not right. A slice of modesty does suit us: out of mercy we have been given a place in the one church that is made up of all people who are set free through Christ. First the (believing) Jews and after that we also. That is why you can't say that God put His nation of Israel aside. Paul makes that clear in Romans 11: 1 and following. He himself was the living proof that God took pity on a remnant. But history went on. As the Lord chose Abraham out of mercy to go further with him (while the promises were for all nations), so He broadened the same mercy for all nations at Pentecost.

With that I hope to make clear which choice we have to make when we think about the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. We have to hold on to the confession of the Gospel and to the confession that teaches that the church is the place where this Gospel is preached. In that church Jews and Palestinians find each other. There, Messiah-confessing Jews and Palestinian Christians are one in the faith in Christ.

The end of hatred, throwing of stones, suicide attacks and military actions are in the peace that Christ gives to and in His church. Peace for Jews, for Palestinians and also for us. "(In Him) in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2: 21, 22). Right across the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians lies the great division between faith and unbelief. On one side of that separation is peace through the Gospel, the good message of the saving work

of Jesus Christ. On the other side reigns chaos that is caused by Satan and sin. Sin and chaos are temporary, but the peace brought by Jesus Christ is eternal. Every Sunday in church we may hear about redemption and forgiveness. That is why Israel is not served with the title 'people of God', apart from believing in redemption and forgiveness. Only the Gospel that is heard in church brings real peace for all people of all nationalities.

■ **Arjan Karsenberg**

For this article I used, among others, articles written by prof. J. Kamphuis that, besides having been published in the weekly magazine De Reformatie, have also been published in the compilation Begrensde Ruimte, Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, Goes, 1996, p. 239-260. The quotation in this article also comes from these articles (p. 257).

South Africa

The Lack of Knowledge

"My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge, because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children." Hosea 4:6

This verse strikes me as one of the most shocking and moving verses in the Bible. It is shocking because it is true that we really have so very little knowledge. Specifically, knowledge about the Bible. And to be destroyed through this? Those words give me the urge to take the Bible and any Christian literature that I can get hold of and to go and sit in a corner somewhere to broaden my knowledge. Because, if there is one thing that I would not like to happen, it is to be destroyed.

I think that we, as youth in this exciting world of the year 2002, are under great temptation to neglect the broadening of our knowledge. There are so many things happening and we are still young! We are still full of energy and want to utilise every opportunity to make our life more interesting. This often takes up much of our precious time...

Don't we almost live out the conviction that we should "eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we will die"? I think that this is a conviction that we like to live out. It is like blinkers that we like to quickly move back into place when people try to remove them. But life goes further than this earthly life. Life is more than all the wine that I would still like to make, all the prizes that I would like to win, all the stir I would like to cause during my short time on earth.

[The author is studying to become a wine grower - editor].

Knowledge of the Lord; knowledge of God and of His purpose for us - that is important, because a lack of knowledge will mean our destruction. That is for sure. Knowledge of God does not mean we just accept every word we read or hear as the infallible truth. We must examine it and convince ourselves that the words that are proclaimed are the truth.

We have reached the stage in our lives where we must begin to accept responsibilities. We must begin to make our own decisions, decisions that can possibly influence the rest of our lives. We must become independent. And how can we remain standing in the flood of well-camouflaged worldly temptations if we have no solid ground under our feet? How can we recognise and reject the heresies? How can we resist the world with all its desires if we don't have knowledge of God? Satan is cunning enough to let knowledgeable people wander off. How much easier will he lead astray a child of God who hears the sound of the bell but doesn't have a clear idea where it hangs?

Discussions with people who have an extensive Bible knowledge sometimes make me anxious. Older people know so much more than I! In this case I often think that age, generally speaking, brings greater knowledge. But it is so easy for us to use this as an excuse for our lack of knowledge, to justify our unwillingness to broaden our

knowledge: "But they are so much older than we..."

But surely our parents must have started building up their knowledge of the Lord somewhere? And as the old saying goes, there is no time like today! To postpone until next year, when I have finished studying, serves no purpose. After all, nobody knows whether we will actually still live to see the end of the year, month, week or day!

We shouldn't be amazed at how wiser people than ourselves can be satisfied to quietly sit in a chair in the sun studying Biblical literature. We should even strive to be satisfied to do the same! "This (a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and holiness) is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

Knowledge of the truth and of God leads to all sorts of other things. Knowledge of God teaches us what He expects from us, His children - how He wants to be served. It teaches us to distinguish between truth and falsehood. It is also for this reason that Solomon points out to us in Proverbs that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7). Let us not allow our youth and impatience to become excuses for our lack of knowledge of what is truly important in our life on earth. Let us rather use these as a motive to utilise all our youthful energy to gain knowledge about our God and heavenly Father!

■ **Corrien Geleijnse**

Aids-The African Crisis

Dirkie is a small boy. Although he is seven years old, he is only the size of a four to five year old. He is frail and frequently ill. Dirkie has AIDS... His mother died a few months ago. She also had AIDS... Dirkie's aunty does her best to take care of Dirkie, but she is unemployed and has no house or money of her own.

A Bleak Picture

There are thousands of children in South Africa who live in similar circumstances as those of Dirkie. Statistics indicate that the African continent has the highest number of children infected by HIV as well as the highest number of AIDS orphans in the world. This is a particular problem in the southern half of Africa, south of the Sahara. This area, which includes South Africa, contains over two thirds of all HIV infected people. Projections with regard to AIDS orphans, suggest that South Africa will have one million AIDS orphans under the age of fifteen by the year 2005.

In South Africa the HIV/AIDS epidemic is said to be one of the most severe in the world. The recently published 2001 survey of women, who attended public health antenatal clinics, indicated that 24.8% of them were infected by HIV. Estimates based on this survey indicate that approximately 4.74 million people in South Africa are HIV positive. It is further estimated that there are about 1700 new infections every day. Projections suggest that by the year 2008 half a million South Africans will die per year from AIDS-related causes. A bleak picture... This picture may, however, be far bleaker since these statistics have been criticised by various scientists. The true figures may well be at least twice as high...

What are HIV and AIDS?

Before we continue it might be good to briefly look at what HIV and AIDS are. From the above-mentioned it should be clear that AIDS is deadly. HIV (Human Immuno-deficiency virus) is a virus that breaks down the immune system, the body's defence system, which protects it from diseases. As a result the person infected by HIV gradually loses his/her resistance to diseases and becomes ill. The final stage of HIV infection, when the person is almost permanently ill is called AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). A person who dies from AIDS thus actually dies from a combination of diseases, such as influenza, tuberculosis and (rare) cancers. In South Africa AIDS is typically covered up by stating a person died from the last disease that he/she had.

AIDS was first discovered in 1981 in America among gay men. Since then it has spread throughout the world. At this stage no cure has been found for AIDS, although doctors can treat many of the diseases caused by HIV. Various treatments also exist that can reduce the HIV count in an infected person, thus delaying the onset of AIDS.

HIV is found in all the bodily fluids of infected persons. The concentration, however, differs from fluid to fluid, with some (such as saliva) having an extremely low concentration. Infected persons can pass HIV on to other people by exposing them to bodily fluids with a high concentration of HIV, namely through unprotected sexual intercourse; sharing needles (drug-related); accidental exposure to infected blood (medical/first aid); blood transfusions; birth (mother-to-child); and breast-feeding (mother-to-child).

The South African Epidemic

Let's now return to the above-mentioned statistics. Why is the South African HIV/AIDS rate so high? Do we have such a large gay community? Do we have so many drug addicts? Or is this a poverty related problem, as the South African government is apt to claim?

Studies of the African epidemic indicate that HIV is spread mainly through heterosexual intercourse and mother-to-child contact. This distinguishes Africa from the western world where HIV has spread mainly through homosexual intercourse and needle sharing (drug addicts).

This pattern is likely related to the low status of African

women. The men sleep around and infect their wives, who may not refuse their husbands sexual intercourse. For prostitutes the problem is of an economic nature in that they get paid more for intercourse without condoms.

In South Africa myths about AIDS abound, further increasing the spread of HIV/AIDS. The President, Thabo Mbeki, made world news when he claimed HIV does not cause AIDS. He claimed the true cause for AIDS is poverty. While it is true that poverty places people at a greater risk for HIV infection, and reduces their resistance to diseases, this claim has caused confusion and has prevented people from taking necessary precautions.

Another myth, spread by traditional healers (witchdoctors) is that sexual intercourse with a virgin will heal the AIDS patient. This cruel myth has led to a rapid increase in rapes of young girls and lately even of babies.

What can be Done?

Is there not something we, as Christian, can do? Can't we somehow help children such as Dirkie, who, by the way, is not a fictitious character, but a real boy who lives in Soshanguve, a township near Pretoria. These were questions also raised at our Evangelism committee in Pretoria. In response, an AIDS committee was started on 1 November 2000. This committee aims to reach out with a Biblical message to people who are affected by AIDS and to care for them.

Their first task was to print posters and pamphlets to bring the gospel to AIDS patients. The message is essentially that, although they face death, they need not face eternal death.

In January 2001 the committee came in contact with a lady from the missionary congregation of Soshanguve-North. This lady is the manager of an Institute for Primary Health Care (IPH). IPH has initiated a home-based care project in order to care for terminal patients, including AIDS patients. The committee became involved in this project. One of the committee members now makes weekly visits to AIDS patients at their homes to care for them, provide advice and provide special food. This food can help to boost their immune system. These food packages cost R600.00 per week. This money has so far been raised through donations.

The committee and IPH are also planning to set up a hospice. They are currently leasing a 13-room guesthouse from the City Council, which they hope to renovate and turn into the hospice. The committee hopes to utilise overseas money as well as local volunteers for this work. They hope that this hospice will enable them to cater for both the physical and spiritual needs of AIDS patients.

Please pray for the success of these projects. Please also pray for South Africa in general. This country needs God's help to combat this epidemic. Those who are dying from AIDS also need to hear about God. He is the only comfort in the face of death.

Feel free to send an email to the following address if you want more information about how you can become involved in these projects: ckleyn@freemail.absa.co.za

■ Willemien Kleyn

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Book Review - *Deadline*

"You should have read this book. It is so nice when it tells of life after death, how beautiful eternal life in heaven will be and how all the choices you make here on earth will have consequences for our life in heaven or in hell. Beautiful! I have never thought about it like that. I thought that eternal life would be singing, praising and glorifying God, but now I realize that's not true. We can also unfurl and develop ourselves in heaven, learn and discover things. You can meet old loved ones and friends who died earlier than you, whom you missed so much. Wonderful! This book helped me to get rid of my fear of death. I now long to be with God. The deadline approaches".

This reaction is about the novel *Deadline* written by the American writer Randy Alcorn. Maybe you have read the book or heard a reaction like this from a friend or acquaintance or someone from the congregation. The novel received a lot of positive reactions like the quote above. In 1994 this novel was published in America and in 1995 in the Netherlands. By now the sixth print has been published. There is a lot of interest in it. That's why I read it as well and I'd like to pass on some things about *Deadline* in this article; the positive aspects, but also the negative ones. I will start with a biography of Randy Alcorn and a summary of the novel's content. Then I want to discuss whether we may fantasize about heaven in this way, about matters which God has only partly revealed to us or even left entirely secret.

Randy Alcorn

Randy Alcorn is the founder and manager of the Eternal Perspective Ministries (EPM) in America. This foundation encourages witnessing to all the people who do not know Christ yet, brings the gospel, provides accommodation for homeless people and counsels pregnant women who want to have an abortion. Before EPM was set up in 1990, Randy Alcorn was a minister in the Good Shepherd Community Church in Gresham, Oregon. He is also a teacher and a popular speaker at conferences. Besides *Deadline* he has written more books, such as *Dominion*, a sequel to *Deadline*. In the epilogue Randy Alcorn gives a reason for writing the novel *Deadline*. I quote a part of that justification: "Secular bookstores are now burgeoning with accounts of after-death experiences and interactions with angelic beings, many of them unbiblical and misleading, some fatally so. If those who believe the Scriptures fail to reverently exercise our God-given imaginations where the Bible opens the door for us to do so, we will leave all portrayals of the eternal realm in the hands of those unconcerned with fidelity to God's Word. This, it seems to me, justifies the inherent risks in attempting to portray the other side of death in a way more consistent with Biblical truth."

Description of content

The principal character in *Deadline* is Jake Woods. He has two very good friends (Doc and Finney) whom he has known his whole life and with whom he has experienced all sorts of adventures. They are inseparable and all three are approximately 50 years old. The three men live close to each other in the American state of Oregon. Doc (Gregory Lowell) is an important surgeon and very good at his work. He doesn't believe in the existence of God, he is a total atheist and that is apparent in his lifestyle. He is married, but is not faithful to his wife. Also in ethical matters he doesn't listen to God's commandments. Finney Keels is a businessman who wants to serve and love God in his work

and personal life. He is married to Sue and together they are active in their church community. Jake is a journalist and stands in between his two friends. He pretends to be liberal, but Finney's joy in life and calmness make him think and doubt a lot. Jake is divorced and feels partly guilty about it, but enjoys his freedom.

The three friends ended up in a hospital after an accident in which the car they were travelling in ran off the road. Jake is alright, but Doc will be disabled for the rest of his life and Finney is in a coma. After a while he passes away. Alcorn describes Finney's death in great detail. While Jake, Sue and Finn (Sue and Finney's son) sit at Finney's bed and Sue reads a part from the book of Revelation, Finney dies. We read how Finney goes to heaven, carried by his guardian angel Zyor:

"Finney could now see many excited images at the far edge, some reaching in toward him. The other, his mysterious companion, now marched ahead of him. The giant slipped out the passageway's end artfully, as if he'd done this before, and moved immediately to the side. Another great being greeted the giant with what appeared to be a salute. Finney moved more slowly, more tentatively, like his first time on water skis. This was the first time he'd ever died.

The crowd visible beyond the passageway grew with each step he took. Some faces he didn't recognise, many he did. He took the last step - or was it the first - and entered the new world. As he came out the end - or was it the beginning - over the threshold, he gasped his first breath of heaven's air. The gasp was a gasp of wonder at the beauty of this place, and the magnificence of its inhabitants." (p. 48).

While we read many things about Finney, we only learn about Doc that he presumably committed suicide in the hospital by pulling the air tube out of his throat. Was this because he didn't want to live his life with a disability? We will never know.

After the funerals for Doc and Finney, Jake goes back to work. But at work he gets a message with these words: 'It was not an accident'. Jake tries to find out what really happened and in the process meets 'fundamentalists' from a pro-life association. Finney and Sue were members of that association and Sue still strongly supports it. Jake finds out things about Doc that he would never have expected his friend would do. Doc carried out several abortions and was also entangled in an ethical scandal. These things and many others make Jake think a lot about the meaning of life and eventually he is converted. Jake contacts his ex-wife again and tries to be a good father for his daughter Carly. Between the descriptions of Jake's experiences we read about what Finney experiences in heaven. I will quote several passages to give you an idea how Alcorn writes about heaven. Finney experienced the conception of a child within his daughter Angela.

"A moment before, he'd been gazing through a giant telescope and studying the distant wonders of Elyon's universe. But now Finney was thrust into what seemed another dimension, neither heaven nor earth. He felt like he was in a huge theatre, viewing a curved screen. Like a planetarium, yet real, not simulated. He had the feeling he'd become much smaller, that he was inside of something - or someone. He was the face of the camera, intimately close to something magnificent on the verge.

Before him was a huge ball, being vigorously assaulted by swimming threads with tiny heads. Both ball and threads were

parts of living beings, but not living beings themselves. The threads frantically searched for an opening to the ball, trying this place, then that. In time they weakened, resigning themselves to failure, wilting into oblivion. One by one they fell off, until center stage switched to one, which showed hope and promise. Yes, it was penetrating, moving inside the ball, and somehow changing it, infusing it with life. Apart from each other, both ball and threads were incomplete. But together they produced something mysterious, something that felt to Finney like the magic of life.

(...)

Suddenly powerful singing enveloped him. He'd never heard the song before, but after hearing the chorus once, he knew it. It was a song about Elyon - his majesty, his greatness, and his power as a creator. Finney saw now he wasn't witnessing this remarkable event alone but was surrounded by many others who watched with equal fascination." (p. 164).

Finney is congratulated from all sides, because he had become a grandfather. His guardian angel Zyor also congratulates him with this conception.

"Congratulations, master. Angela is a godly young woman. You raised her to follow the Almighty. She will be a fine mother for this girl, as her mother was for her. And the father is a godly man - with your guidance, Angela chose him well. Elyon is pleased." (p. 168).

Finney can look to earth from heaven and see what happens there.

"The celebration was suddenly eclipsed by a realisation that something was happening in the dark world, something somehow connected to him. Finney's mind went first to Jake, and then to Jake's teenage daughter Carly. Yes, that was it. Carly was in trouble, and Jake didn't know about it. But Finney was being

called to prayer. He rushed to the portal." (p.169).

Many odd things are said about heaven and we read that Finney is totally happy. According to Alcorn you get to know God's wisdom by your own mistakes, which you made on earth (the dark world). You'll never know completely, but every time again you will be astonished by God's Wisdom and Power. You've got time to learn, to grow in knowledge and to enjoy the beautiful things you come across in heaven. Near the end of the book we also find out what happened to Doc. He went to hell. I also would like to quote a passage here.

"Where was everybody? Doc had never felt so utterly alone. He was waiting for someone to come, a citizen of this realm to orient him, to explain the ground rules, the boundaries and opportunities of this world. There was an invisible fence. He could sense it. A limiting wall that could not be penetrated. An iron curtain locking him in, preventing any escape. This was confinement. Much worse, it was solitary confinement. He kept hoping it was only temporary." (p. 340).

Hell is described as an endless nothing, in which you rotate in endless circles of your own thoughts.

After much research Jake discovers the bewildering truth about the fatal car crash, an outcome that is a surprise for the reader. *Deadline* concludes, as you may expect from a novel, with a happy ending.

(book review to be concluded next issue)

■ **Menja Mollema-Reitsema**

Congress 2002

Friday 27th September 2002 to Monday 30th September 2002

All youth of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and their sister Churches are invited to Congress 2002.

Rev Bouwman will present two papers on the theme:

The Return of Christ

In his papers he will introduce the topic for discussion, focusing on

- What are the last days
- What does the Bible say about the Return of Christ
 - What are the secular ideas of the last days and the Return of Christ

Registration for Congress will be from 7.30pm Friday 30th September at the Roleystone Hall, Wygonda Rd Roleystone

Tickets will cost \$30.00 for all activities.

Further details and tickets can be obtained from your club secretaries.

SPYSC Petition Update

Mr Randall tabled our petition on embryonic stem cell research in Federal Parliament on 26 August 2002. A record of the petition is contained in Hansard. (This can be viewed on the web by going to <http://www.aph.gov.au> and clicking on the following sequence: Find; Browse; Chamber; House Hansard; 2002; Spring; 26 August 2002.)

At the time of writing (mid-September) the Bill was still in the Lower House. Members of Parliament have been given a conscience vote (ie. they can decide how to vote individually) and so far there have been speeches by over 100 members. These speeches can be found by following the above links and provide insight into the thoughts and values of the rulers of this country.

A number of speakers argued that life does not begin at conception and therefore they have no problem with the research. Others (like the Prime Minister) argue that the embryos are going to die anyway, and therefore support the research in the hope it will cure some terrible diseases. Others still oppose the research arguing that life from conception should be respected and protected.

One politician ended his speech with the words... "In light of all these arguments both for and against, I make my decision on this bill based on my ethical beliefs driven by a strong commitment to my God. I refer you to Psalm 139:13-16, which, in summary, says that the unborn are known and loved by God."

Calloused Soles

When we speak of the challenges facing Christians in 2002, there is a vast array of topics that require our attention and interaction. There are issues in science, in the church, in education, in the arts, in daily living, in politics and management, indeed, in every part of life, that demand thorough investigation and the consequent formulation of a Scriptural perspective. There is far more than just a square inch of our lives that desperately needs the redeeming effect of being brought captive to our Lord Jesus Christ. And we are only doing our duty as servants when we devote enthusiasm, time and true commitment to the subordination of our whole life to the norms and purposes of God as He reveals them in His Word. The opportunities to present our lives as sacrifices of thankfulness are many and varied.

However, to move, work and be productive in life, we need a source of energy and power. The unbelievers dash around in circles, believing that their own feet will sustain them and provide them with whatever they consider important and take them to wherever they wish to go. True Christians, however, profess to have naturally useless feet and claim their power and direction from an entirely separate source. So, while some stumble on with calloused, broken and bleeding soles, we, as children of God, are only too happy to be lifted and empowered by His Holy Spirit.

Aren't we?

While it is important to discuss the issues facing us today, both old and new, I believe it is more important to reflect for a moment on this idea of where we obtain power to find and implement any strategies we devise. For, just as the value of a plan rests completely on the integrity of the foundations, so any attempt to live for God, no matter how well intended, will succeed or fail on the integrity of the spiritual foundation of our life. This needs to be discussed, because even though we speak in reverent tones of the power of God, I believe, from personal observation, that in reality we are leaving the arms of the Lord and gently testing our feet on the ground.

What is it then, that threatens to come between us and complete trust in our heavenly Father?


It has many names. In various discussions and statements it has been called 'the situation', 'circumstances', 'reality', 'the social and cultural context', or 'past experience'. This is that beast that seems to be too much for the Lord to handle. So we admit, 'Yes, we know

what the Lord wants of us, but consider the situation. It's just not possible, it's unrealistic.'

And so it begins. We know how we must live, but we worry that the pressure from peers in a certain place is too much to handle. We confess the one true church but appreciate that in reality it is not so simple. We commit to the two-fold purpose of marriage but acknowledge that it is better for the husband-wife relationship if children are postponed for a time. We admit that our places of leisure are not the best, but where else is there to go? We know that our friends often act no differently than the world, but we need to have social contact of some sort! If we bothered to think a little deeper we would understand why our music is offensive to God, but then we couldn't listen to anything. We feel that club discussions are often shallow and artificial, but that is just a stage we go through. We know that smoking is a sin against the sixth commandment, but we all know an old person who did it for years and didn't suffer for it, so why should we worry about it? We know that confessions are important, but they never filled a political membership list. And so it goes on, all presented in an attitude of patronizing wisdom dressed in the cheap robes of good intentions. Society teaches us, secular psychologists instruct us, life occurrences convince us and our own reasoning encourages us, to be realistic.

So, do we want to live to the glory of God? 'Of course', goes up the indignant cry, 'as much as is possible.' And it is this ambiguous phrase which summarises the tendency to leave God and His idealism and look at life with our real insight and practical perspective, from a human level. For this claim, which could send a believer to a martyr's death, loses all beauty when we arrogantly take it upon ourselves to define and qualify the 'possible'.

Thus, when we speak of challenges for Christians in 2002 and onward, I propose that we do not speak firstly of genetic research, or environmental concerns, or doctrinal shifts, or the abuse of drugs and of media, or medical ethics or tolerance. The first and great challenge is to simply know God as the LORD; to know Him as our Covenant Father, who will give us everything we need if we ask it of Him in faith, from the most personal emotional support to the blessings required to initiate large scale projects in His Kingdom. The challenge is to put ourselves unconditionally into His hand and under His rule. The challenge is to have an attitude that has as its reference point God's promises, rather than the reality within which we apply them. And further, to be unwavering in this confidence, regardless of



how often things do not turn out as we had hoped. So that we may say in absolute sincerity, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me'.

Then, and only then, can we apply ourselves to the issues of the moment. For then we know that any appeal to reality or the situation is nothing more than false humility, nothing more than contempt for God's promises and a denial of the effect of Christ's work in our lives. Our God who supplied everything in creation and accomplished everything for our salvation also provides everything for our sanctification and the activities which that inspires.

**The Contender can now
be viewed on the web**

<http://www.frsa.asn.au/contender/>

COUNCIL HOUSE VISIT

**Ever wondered how local decisions are made?
Who decides how the rates money is spent?
How planning is made for the future of Armadale?**

SPYSC has organised an outing so you can hear first hand at a local Armadale City Council meeting what proceedings are in place and how decisions are made about local issues.

Mr Jim Everts will also be showing us the upstairs part of the councils and chambers.

The meeting commences at 7.30 pm, but you are welcome to join us for a healthy bite to eat at Subway, Jull Street at 6.30pm.

When: **Monday, 7th October 2002**

Where: **Meetings are held on the first floor of the Council Administration Building (access to car park from Jull Street, Armadale).**

Time: **7.30 for the meeting in Council House, or 6.30 for dinner at Subway**

Please let Dean, Steve or Andrew know if you plan to attend
(see below for contact details.)

Looking forward to seeing you there!

From the SPYSC committee

Dean Huizinga (9399 2343 or dean.huizinga@unitedkg.com.au)
Andrew Van Burgel (9399 2738 or andrewvb@graduate.uwa.edu.au)
Hester Bax
Stephen Posthuma (9497 9470 or posthus@frsa.asn.au)
Natalie Kleyn

Therefore let us repent and return to our only comfort in life and death, in any situation. We can go to Him, knowing that He will not despise a broken and contrite heart. And He will certainly, with joy, heal and give rest to broken and calloused soles.

■ **Sean Wagenaar**



CONTENDER

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

Mick ten-Haaf

Kristy Gunnink

Andrew van Burgel

Bruce Huizinga

Royce Vermeulen

Sean Wagenaar

Editorial Address

2 Haimlee Street, Kelmscott 6111
tenhaam@frsa.asn.au

The deadline for materials to be used in the next issue is 2nd October.