

their work, because they are constantly struggling to overcome many issues and gain a truly effective working relationship. To spend 5 years coming to grips with a culture and then to decide to leave at what is only the beginning of the real work of translation is something not conducive to good Bible translation or effective mission work. When you consider that translating the New Testament can take between 10 - 20 years, and then add on to that the Old Testament, you have a lifetime's work or more! In fact, many early field missionaries also packed a coffin along with their belongings when setting out on assignment.

Wycliffe has a two-year training program for their field workers. Wycliffe have recognised that the secret to long term (and God willing) field success is preparation. Wycliffe believe the better the preparation of a translator or field support worker, the longer they will be able to stay in the field and complete their work.

Wycliffe in the Asia Pacific

Wycliffe has many bases in the Asia Pacific, large bases in Darwin and Melbourne, the Philippines and PNG. They also have many smaller support bases, such as at Alice Springs and Cairns. In fact, some of our own mission workers have taken introductory field courses offered through Wycliffe and SIL to help them prepare for their fieldwork.

Conclusion

In many parts of the world, including parts of Australia, a slow but increasingly rapid change is taking place. Progress is being made. Many people will one day hear the Word of God and have access to the scriptures in their native language, both for knowledge and reproof. Over 500 translations have been completed, and hundreds more are in the process. With God's provision, Townsend's vision will be realized. This task is important. Let's pray that the Spirit may work through the hands and in the hearts of sinful man causing the number of the elect to be complete.

richard t'hart

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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"contending earnestly for the faith ..." Jude :3

editorial

Do you have time to read this magazine? If you are like many of our co-inhabitants in the Western World you might not be so sure. In Australia, at the dawn of the 21st century, life is hurtling along at an ever-increasing pace. We are the generation of fast food, instant messaging and broadband internet access. Employers and Educators alike enjoy throwing around phrases like: "increasing efficiency" or "maximising productivity". As youth of God's Church this trend towards busyness does not pass us by. Church, Bible study club, work, school, friends, family and hobbies all demand our attention and time. Ask your friends after Church on Sunday what their week was like and most likely the answer you'll receive is: "Busy."

Our generation is not the first to deal with a busy life. Some two and a half thousand years ago a small group of Jews were experiencing the same thing. They had spent 70 years exiled in Babylon and had only recently returned to Canaan to rebuild their lives in the Promised Land. There was much work to be done. Homes and cities that had been left in ruins by the Babylonian invaders needed to be rebuilt. The soil left dormant needed to be tilled again and crops planted.

In the midst of their busy lives the Lord sends the prophet Haggai to His people with a

message. "You have sown much and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, earns wages to put in a bag with holes" (Haggai 1:6). These Jews were working hard yet they did not seem to make any progress. They were never satisfied or happy with the fruit of their labours.

Do you ever have the same feeling? You can't seem to get ahead in saving for that house, car or holiday. Your schoolteacher bemoans your work regardless of how much time you put into it. Is your life full of commitments but lacking in contentment?

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The Lord through the prophet Haggai tells his children why they are not happy. They were not being obedient to Him. God had moved King Cyrus to send the Jews back to Jerusalem in order that they might rebuild the temple. God wanted the Gospel message of forgiveness of sins portrayed in the temple sacrifices to be proclaimed to His people again. But while God's house lay in ruins the Israelites still ran to their own houses. Because of this the Lord was not blessing their work.

Is there time in your busy life for obedience to God? God wants us also to be instructed by His Gospel. We must read the Bible, think about it and understand what it means for our lives. This takes time and effort. But service to God is more than simply one item on a list of "things to do." We were created for glorifying

God's name. Without that, our life loses its meaning and we receive no satisfaction from the fruit of our labours.

The returned exiles listened to Haggai's message and began rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. In response the Lord says, "From this day I will bless you." This promise the Lord also gives to us today. If we live our life close to His Word He will bless, even though not always in the way that we might like. While so much of the Western World is harried and dissatisfied, God's children may be content. So go ahead, take the time to read on.

arend witten

do we agree to disagree?

How many times has it been when you are in a deep and meaningful discussion (or not so meaningful) and the discussion seems to be centered on two arguments continually put up against each other, that a question is asked 'Do we agree to disagree?' I, for one, have heard this a few times in club, and personally think that it should be a question we should avoid when discussing the scriptures. Because many people have different opinions and views on things in the world, I can see that this question has its place to maintain order, but in a scriptural discussion the question 'should we agree to disagree?' should not be asked.

Before trying to find out if we should or shouldn't "agree to disagree", we should first consider why the question is asked in the first place. One of the reasons would be time. Most of the youth clubs start at 8:00pm and go to about 9:45pm. While this supports a good hour and a half discussion, there is not enough time to dwell on just one point. It would be at the cost of other people's points or questions.

In addition, sometimes a great dividing issue can be touched upon in a discussion. People will have their own opinions which disagree with others and therefore an argument (instead of discussion) can result. Here the leader (after allowing some time) will have to use the

'If you really want to find the light, you've got to use the right equipment.'

'peace' question "shall we agree to disagree?" in order to allow discussion to continue for the benefit of the rest of the club.

Thirdly, sometimes asking the question will make the discussion easier to follow since it is not so nice that the discussion is theological (in depth), because it is difficult to discuss. An increasing tendency is that people are afraid of using scripture to prove scripture in biblical discussions. Thus, rather than delving into God's Word, we "agree to disagree".

While sometimes these excuses, and others not mentioned, are valid and could be quite reasonable, the discussion should not be brought to a premature stop with the 'agree' question. Rather, the question and/or discussion should be further discussed as the reasons for stopping are not valid. Alternatively, it can be put away till the next week, allowing the 'two' parties to do some research at home during the week, or the question should be put to others (for example other clubs, minister, parents etc). Here in West

ed over 578 New Testaments and are working in 1246 language projects. They publish Bibles or dictionaries - and also rely on other organizations to publish the Bibles they translate. These Scriptures are published primarily by The Bible League and other organizations and are distributed in the country where used.

History of Wycliffe

WBT was founded in 1934 by William Cameron Townsend, a missionary to the Cakchiquel Indians of Guatemala.

When as a young man Cameron Townsend tried to sell Spanish Bibles in Guatemala in 1917-18, he discovered that the majority of the people he met did not understand Spanish. Townsend had the vision to translate the Bible into other languages after Cakchiquel-speaking men expressed their concern and surprise that God did not speak their language. Townsend abandoned his attempts to sell Bibles and began living among the Cakchiquels. He learned their complex language, created an alphabet for it, analysed the grammar, and translated large sections of the Bible in the remarkably short span of ten years.

Townsend resolved that every man, woman and child should be able to read God's Word in their own language. Borrowing the name of the Reformation hero, John Wycliffe, who first translated the Bible into English in 1382, Townsend founded "Camp Wycliffe" in 1934 as a linguistics training school. By 1942, "Camp Wycliffe" had grown into two sister organizations, Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Vision 2025

Today, the Summer Institute of Linguistics and Wycliffe Bible Translators work together to translate Scripture, train field personnel in linguistics and promote interest in translation. Together they work towards the lofty goals set out in Vision 2025: "Our vision is to see translation in progress among every language group that needs it by 2025."

Why Translate the Bible?

The Scriptures are essential for mission/evangelism & spiritual growth. Jesus told His followers to take the Gospel to the entire world. However, there are still hundreds of language groups who don't have God's Word in their mother tongue-the language they understand the best. History shows that there has

a bible for all those who desire it

never been a strong indigenous church without the translated written Scriptures used by indigenous leaders. Missionaries depend on Scriptures in the language of the people with whom they work to make a lasting impact.

Problems faced in Translating

Just like other missionaries, translators face many of the same dangers and setbacks when preparing for & doing their work in God's Kingdom. They often experience political setback and even physical harm. However the problems they face are not limited to the realm of human relationships.

Translating the bible is not just simply a matter of translating the written word from one language to the other language. Language and Culture are inseparably linked. You cannot fully understand a language without having an understanding of its Culture.

The Bible is full of links to the geography, time and lifestyle in which the Israelites lived. Examples of this are references to East Winds, chariots, the summer heat, shepherds, vineyards and fishing.

However try to translate to another language where there is no word for sheep or a concept such as shepherd. Or try to translate where the subject language has no word for fish or concept of fisherman or boat. You may question this but with many cultures & languages this is a problem. You may shrug, but this is a problem for many landlocked languages. These two concepts are very important in understanding many of the words of Christ in the New Testament.

Summer Institute of Linguistics

The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) and Wycliffe are sister organisations. Much of the language study, documentation and academic work are performed by linguists attached to SIL but separate from Wycliffe. There are many reasons for this, but there are two definite benefits that result. Firstly, many countries organise linguists to document their cultural heritage, particularly if they don't have the resources to do this themselves. Those linguists are then able to prompt and aid nationals to translate God's Word, the second benefit.

Preparation for the work

The work of mission is a lifelong calling. It is difficult for many missionaries to achieve real results if they do not understand the culture in which they have immersed themselves. Most society structures in other cultures are far more complex than our own Western Society. Taboos and social hierarchy are difficult to learn and understand. Many (foreign) missionaries struggle to be truly effective in the first years of

spysc a journey to png

On 15th June 2004 a group of around 25 young people gathered in the familiar environment of Room 12 at John Calvin Christian College. What brought us all there was a SPYSC meeting, where Greta Ballast was to speak about her recent experiences in PNG as a short-term mission worker. We received a real life demonstration of the infamous 'PNG-time' following a discrepancy in understanding of starting times meaning the speaker arrived a good ½ hour after most of the audience!

Despite this shaky start, the meeting proved to be an informative insight into some of Greta's experience, and gave us all better understanding of the mission work our churches are conducting in PNG. Greta shared with us her photos through a power point presentation, and images of Lae, village life, and the PNG nationals filled the room. For myself, having been to PNG, the sights and sounds came flooding back - of slashing grass with bush knives, ladies carrying bilums, the sweet potato, and the abject poverty in many areas.

Because Greta is a qualified nurse, it was wonderful to see how she could assist in a very practical way in health issues. Having seen first hand the lack of medical resources and knowledge in PNG, as well as the shocking injuries and illnesses people sustained, it was wonderful to see Greta being able to have an impact in that area. She held health talks highlighting some basic hygiene issues that are the cause of much

of the preventable disease, and also ran a clinic where she could treat some of the injuries and allergies.

Greta spent her time with Justin and Karen Bolhuis, the mission workers at Lae. Through her photos we also got an insight into the work they are conducting. It was a real blessing to see images of church services, of bible studies, and of the community working on the new church block. It was a blessing to see the work of God in PNG.

We also got a small understanding of the difficulties presented by workers sharing the gospel in a country like PNG. Not only is it difficult to work in a third-world country, there are also problems faced dealing with a cross-cultural situation, battling the superstitious beliefs, concerns about security, and working in a very isolated and often lonely environment. Greta encouraged us all to remember the mission work in our prayers, and support the mission workers by letter or email. She made us realise how hard it can be to be isolated from that with which we are familiar.

We all left the meeting with a wider view of our world, a better appreciation of just how materially blessed we are in Australia, and with a thankfulness to God for the church-gathering work taking place all over the globe.

natalie kleyn

wycliffe bible translators

At Easter 2002 the Pitjantjara people of South Central Australia Deserts gathered together in a special ceremony to receive an almost complete Bible. What's so special about this you may ask? What was different about this Bible?

This: it was written in their own native language. A language they could understand, listen to and identify with. This was not simply the result of some 6-12 months of work and pushing out a bible. It had taken 24 long years of hard work to get to this point. It took translating, reverse-translating and many other checks to ensure accuracy and quality. Who would dedicate 24 years or longer to work on one project like this? And why? You may even ask, can't they, the recipients, just read the English ver-

sion? In short, no they cannot. This is not always possible.

The Bible for the Pitjantjara people, the Northern Territory's Kriol, Torres Straight Creole and versions for many in other parts of the Globe have been made possible by the work of an organization called Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT or Wycliffe). WBT have many dedicated workers across the globe. They work on translation projects similar to the one described above.

What is Wycliffe?

Wycliffe is solely devoted to Bible translation. Wycliffe members and their co-workers have translat-

Kelmscott we have a 'too hard to ask basket' club evening, where the minister comes in and helps us discuss questions that we have had problems with throughout the year.

We as Christians of one Church should be able to agree on aspects concerning the scripture and our faith (i.e. doctrine). Now, I know that this does not happen and I would be dreaming if I thought that we could all agree on all things. But do we try enough to resolve our scriptural 'disagreements'? Are we thoroughly searching through the scriptures and delving into commentaries and outlines for the answers to all our

(and others') questions, or are we slack and try to weave ourselves out of researching for the answer?

Youth, I think that we should indeed strive to have more in-depth discussions and avoid the "agree question" like the plague. You should not disagree on doctrine. There is, after all, only one truth. Once we have our faith in common with the same understanding, then, and only then, we can go out and win others for Christ.

frank janssen

in defence of the Lords Supper

In a discussion I recently encountered with a Catholic, I was somewhat startled to be told that they did not believe that their Eucharist is a literal interpretation of Christ's words in Mark 14: 22-24: "...Take, eat; this is my body...This is my blood of the new covenant." I was somewhat taken back when this person explained that they do not really believe that the wine becomes the blood and that the bread becomes the body of Christ. As reformed Christians, we believe that Catholics deny the completeness of Christ's sacrifice. We understand that what they believe is this: there is a need to continually celebrate the sacrament of mass (that is, the communion in the breaking of bread and pouring out of wine). We confess that the papal mass is "nothing but a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry" (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 30, and Q.A. 80). Yet, here was a Catholic who staunchly said that they do not believe that Christ continually needs to be sacrificed (same as we do), and that the bread and wine are not literally transformed into the body and blood of Christ (same as we do). Still, they do believe that He is present in the bread and wine (transubstantiation).

Now, it is not my intention to outline the teachings of the Catholic Church on the topic of Mass, but I do wish to outline a reformed defence of the non-literal (symbolic) interpretation of the words of Jesus Christ as they are recorded in the three gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) and in 1

Corinthians 11: 23-26. I don't think our 5 bodily senses are deceiving us when we partake of the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper table! I will try and show how Catholics are holding to an incorrect interpretation of Scripture.

'The Lord's Supper remembers Christ's death and points forward to His second coming.'

In the defence of the correct interpretation of scripture, there are a few important aspects to remember about the context of the time in which Jesus lived, the time of the institution of the Lord's Supper. Firstly, when Jesus spoke the words "Take eat; this is my body..." (Matthew 26: 26, 27) to his disciples, at this time there was no other possible interpretation than symbolic. This is because Christ had not died, or 'been broken' yet. After Jesus celebrated the last Passover, it was fulfilled in the prophetic sense, and no longer needed to be celebrated: "...for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16). The Passover pointed forward to Him. The Lord's Supper remembers Christ's death - points forward to His second coming. However when Jesus spoke to his disciples, He was not crucified yet,

although the disciples could not have missed the symbolic intent of His statement.

Secondly, metaphoric language (words of symbolism) was a typical Hebraic trait in explanations. One only has to think of Jesus' symbolism and use of metaphor in His parables. The Parable of the Soils (Luke 8: 4-15) uses symbolism to portray the Word of God as the physical seed being spread in a field. In this parable God judicially 'closes the eyes' of some believers, so that they did not fully comprehend the message of the Word. The Parable of the Two Foundations (Luke 6: 46-49) is one where Jesus explains that those who hear His message and who do it are "...like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock." Here, Jesus likens this wise person to the construction of a house upon a rock - sure, steady, and firm. The literary use of metaphor, therefore, is not something foreign to Jesus' ministry. We therefore accept that Christ was referring symbolically to His coming death, and that, in remembrance, the bread and wine do not literally become the body and blood respectively.

'We accept that Christ was referring symbolically to His coming death, and that, in remembrance, the bread and wine do not literally become the body and blood respectively.'

Some Catholics (not dissimilar to the one I encountered), although in improbable agreement with the past two points, may point staunchly to John 6: 54, where He says "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." The Jews could not understand this saying of Jesus, as the Old Testament laws prevented Jews from eating food that contained blood (Leviticus 17: 10-14). The Jews, therefore, could not see the spiritual

significance of the veiled saying which Jesus was describing to them "...the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die" (John 6: 50). The Jews quarrelled as a result (vs. 52) and Jesus needed to explain more fully about the meaning of the eternal symbolism of His flesh and His blood:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed ... As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread, which came down from heaven - not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever." (John 6: 53b-59)

Jesus wants to point out here that, just as physical food nourishes our physical bodies in this life, so Jesus nourishes our bodies to eternal life. It is clear that especially in verse 54, Jesus is talking in the context of Himself as the source of eternal life. Jesus alludes to the soon-to-be abolished laws of the Old Testament concerning eating 'bloody' meat, but His main point here is regarding the necessity to believe in His death on the cross, in order to receive eternal life. And Jesus is the source of this 'bread'. The words "feeds on me" should be taken in a spiritual sense, referring to the reliance of a Christian solely on Christ's death for salvation.

The doctrine of Transubstantiation is difficult to understand, but we can say that, as with both of the sacraments (Baptism and Holy Supper), we hold to the confession that the sacrament of Holy Supper, instituted by Christ, is a "visible sign and pledge" that we "share in His true body and blood" and that we are accounted "His suffering and obedience...as if we personally had suffered and paid for our sins" (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 29, Q.A. 79). The Holy Supper, therefore, is a remembrance of Christ's death, a reminder of our forgiveness of sins, a foreshadowing of our bodily renewal, and a strengthening and assurance of our faith in the "bread of life" as our only source of salvation.

bruce huizinga

some people need to survive on a bare minimum, while we can have anything we want?

It is true that we are not to question God's governance of the economic world. However, we have so much! We are so richly blessed and we barely recognize it! On the other hand, despite the poverty, the homelessness, the malnourishment, the rubbish-covered roads, the potholes, the fleas, the typhoid and malaria, the people in Lae still radiate satisfaction, contentment, ease and happiness!

So, what does the title of this article, the fourth petition, have to do with all this? One culture has all the daily bread, and the other has very 'little' daily bread. As part of the Lord's Prayer, this petition also points above all to the fulfillment of the first three petitions. In other words, the fact that we receive food and drink and material blessings must cause us to ultimately serve the Lord better. Let me explain.

For me, who came to Lae from this affluent Western culture, it was a shock. I was pretty taken aback at third world life! The culture and the poverty was definitely something to get used to. I remember my first weeks in Lae - there was no other way that I could express the differences between cultures, other than saying that "it is so DIFFERENT!!"

'God has given us so very much.'

As the weeks rolled by, I got more and more insight into the daily life of the people in Lae. I got to see what their work was like, their diets, their health standards, their housing standards, their dress, and I got to see what their daily lives consisted of.

The more I saw, the more I wanted to help. I wanted to give to them of my own wealth! But I also recognized that for me to do this would not be beneficial in the long run.

For the PNG people, their poor health standard is all they have ever known. Their diets, housing, dress and work is for them just so normal! It is an ordinary thing to have to face continual sickness, to live in huts amongst the rubbish and to dress only in 'rags'.

But how thirsty these people are for the gospel! They live day by day, and they are so willing to speak openly of their beliefs! By our standards they live in poverty, but how they long to be filled rather with the riches of Scripture!

Coming back home then, I was again confronted with a totally different world. I have already mentioned the flash cars, plush homes. Huge shopping centers, lots of clothes, lots of wealth, new appliances all the time, fast internet and mobile phones etc.

And there is no way at all that I can say that all this is wrong. Our luxury is indeed a gift of God. There is no way that I can say it is immoral to live the way we do.

But, it also brought questions. To what extent is it REALLY a blessing? Could all our extra comforts actually be leading us into temptation? Could it be that we sometimes even fall into temptations of greediness, dissatisfaction, evil desires for a better job, a nicer car, a bigger home theatre and a large house? Could it be that by falling into such temptations we actually turn our back to our Heavenly Father? Could it be that we then minimize our Majestic Lord, and elevate our sinful selves? Are we building our own Kingdom instead of our Father's?

Yes, now that I've been back from Lae for over a month, I see myself falling into those temptations time and again too. Indeed, it's a continual struggle to have to deny ourselves and elevate God's kingdom.

But just think!! God has given us so very much. Let's turn Satan's attacks around, and use our wealth to praise God rather than fall into temptations of discontent etc! Let us be good stewards of God's gifts and use them to give Him greater honour and praise!

For then we will not be discontent! Then our "daily bread" will not be a snare to us. We will desire only the "daily bread" that honours God's holy Name. We will not desire the "daily bread" in order to elevate ourselves.

Let's not take our earthly riches for granted, but let us continually be thankful for them. Let us also show this thankfulness, by using our riches to God's glory alone!

Indeed, let us by our normal, wealthy way of life still show others around us how hungry we are for that real and everlasting bread!

Hmmm, so how do we do that? We have very little time - our work and fast western culture dictates what we do. How can we, when living in such a fast pace, secular society, still have time for God? How can we maintain our faith?

More on that next time....

greta ballast

can be told. But there must be an end, and so we conclude for this issue with some of the words of Hymn 24:4:

"For I'm convinced that neither powers, death nor life, Nor angels, things to come, things present, princes, strife, Nor height, nor depth, nor ANY thing created Will from the love of God now keep us separated..."

We encourage you to pray for Br Jacob, his family, and for all those who struggle against the powers of this world in India, that ultimately God's Name may be glorified the more, that the number of the elect may become full, and that He may return soon on the clouds of heaven.

eric dekker

'We encourage you to pray for Br Jacob, his family, and for all those who struggle against the powers of this world in India.'

on the other hand

Read this in connection to the article on Wycliffe Bible translations...

1. Is there any use translating Bibles into a different language if there is no preacher to explain it to the natives? Consider the Ethiopian and Philip....
2. Is it appropriate to translate Bibles into another language if it will be used to spread the WRONG message by being used by false preachers?
3. Is it appropriate to change the Bible itself (e.g. change the parables themselves while translating) in order to make it more culturally understandable?

What do you think? SHORT responses (max 150 words) to be emailed to eric.dekker@frsa.asn.au

'give us this day our daily bread ...'

The poverty confronts you day by day... Naked, malnourished children run bare-footed over the potholed roads... Lone women, sitting cross-legged on the rubbish covered road sides, try to sell coconuts... Men lie in a make-shift hammock between the beach palms because there is nowhere else to sleep... Scrawny, beaten, flea covered dogs wander through the settlement... Homeless children try to earn a few Kina's by washing cars or collecting cans... And everywhere, people are dressed in rags.

Back home again... Well-dressed, healthy children are taken by car to their day-care or to school... Women in their new clothes and fancy hair styles go shopping for un-necessaries when they like... After a night of sleep on thick, comfortable mattresses, men

dress in suit and tie for work... In the evenings, healthy, cared for dogs are taken for their daily walk... Children live in plush, carpeted homes, and receive \$3 pocket money each week... We all worry about our dress and shop for new clothes regularly!

Yup, these are two completely different cultures. Materially, the one has everything and the other has little. This can easily lead us all to the question "Why??!!" Why on earth do so many people have to constantly battle with diseases such as malaria and typhoid, while we and others can afford a doctor when we need one, and so live in relatively good health? Why on earth do some people have to struggle to earn two dollars a day, while we can spend three dollars on a cup of coffee whenever we like? Why do

on a mission stories to inspire

The Australian government would like Australian families to increase in size, in part for "the good of the country." To motivate couples to increase the size of their families a large financial inducement was announced.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the world, others have also been busy working at increasing the size of another family. However, in this case there were different things to be expected by new arrivals. Certainly there was no cash incentive offered. There was no large scale advertising campaign to announce that there would be a reward for success in adding to this family. The treasurer of this country would not be expected to congratulate those others already in the family.

In fact, the opposite could be expected. New additions could expect suffering. Rejection. Loss of material goods.

Welcome to any number of countries. And as to which family has these practical problems, why, it's the Church! So, perhaps we should write it in this way: the Family! God's Family, made up of His children.

We are settled here in this land with ever so much going for us. In fact, we've got the lot, as they say. So words like "persecution", "deprivation" and "rejection" don't always mean a great deal. We may THINK we've got a good understanding, but often our thoughts turn to the Reformers and burnings at the stake. That's not life in 2004.

'We are settled here in this land with ever so much going for us.'

We hope the Lord will allow us to share some real life mission work stories in issues to come; stories from places all over the world - India, PNG, and others. Some of the stories may

be familiar, some will be new. They will be new because they haven't happened as of today yet. But these stories will be published in the hope that there will be two results.

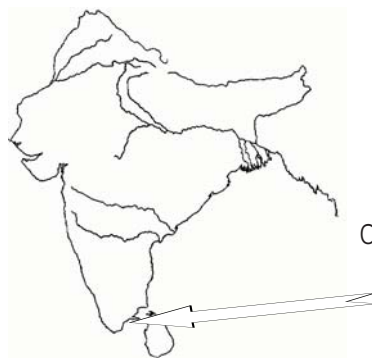
'We hope the Lord will allow us to share some real life mission work stories in issues to come.'

In the first place, hopefully a new appreciation for our blessings, both physical and (more importantly) spiritual will be realised. A practical result of these stories should be that we pray more earnestly, if not more consciously, for those who suffer in practical ways because they have become part of our (God's!) wonderful Family. For that is what is often happening. You will read stories of brothers and sisters who are forced to swap earthly families for a spiritual Family. You may eventually read the account of the young boy who was beaten repeatedly because he refused to give his hair as a sacrifice to a Hindu god. You might learn of the villager who was refused medical help for his labouring wife - all because of a new dependence on a new (OLD!) God. And these stories should lead to a second result.

Yes, secondly, God Himself should be more glorified as a result of receiving this information. For when there is a "lucky" escape from death by a mission worker, it's His doing. And when a new government comes into power repealing and changing anti-Christian laws, that too is His doing. And when a young boy refuses to succumb to beatings, even that is because of His help. And so, we encourage you to read these stories with this in mind, remembering that history is being made today, and history is nothing less than "His story".

eric dekker

chilling tales from a hot country



Chennai and Karanai are fairly close to each other in this area of India.

problem. She was told to "choose one or the other. Job or church, what's it to be?" She quit her job. This did not happen to her just once, but twice!

Brother Karthik is 24 years old. He was given different ultimatum. His choice was between church or family. He lived with his mother. However, when he chose to go to church his mother left. But that wasn't all. Not only did he lose his family, he was forced to renounce all his old friends as well - tough call. Would you (we) go so far?

Sister Muthammal lives with her uncle because her parents have refused to allow her in the house while she attends Christian worship services. She has been kicked out of home. And there are many more examples showing how believers, with His grace, are committed to the faith. Br Jacob acknowledges that he (and we all) can be thankful to the Lord for giving them faith in their hearts and for continuing to work faith in them.

Not only is there a great commitment to come to the gatherings, but there is also perseverance in the face of other, even more overt, persecution. Listen to this...

Karanai is a village in which Br Jacob works. Many of the villagers are uneducated. They are also, in Jacob's words, uncompromisingly committed (perhaps they haven't heard of the latest Western idea - tolerance. I wish we hadn't either!). This lack of compromise was evident in the following series of events.

The believers faced threats from the other villagers. You see, there is a Hindu majority in Karanai and this group has been collecting money for the building of a temple for the last four months. While some villagers paid money, our believers refused to pay for the temple construction.

The village leader, a Mr Mahendran, gathered all the people on 1 April at 7 o'clock in the evening. His plan was to set a date for paying the money owed for the building of the temple. The villagers gathered at the time set by the village leader. I doubt it was planned to be a long meeting, but it turned out that no-one got home until 3AM (that's right, 3.00 o'clock in the morning!!). The discord which had been festering in the village since some members became Christians intensified when some of the believers refused to pay the expected 250 rupees. They said they could not and would not pay the money as they were Christians and they belonged to Christ (they now had a new Family).

The Hindus responded by saying that if they did not pay, there would be consequences.

"What consequences?"

"Well, then we will keep you out of village. We will not permit you to take water from the well and we will break the water line which goes to your house. You won't be able to take advantage of the offer for free Government housing. You will also not have any access to the village shop. You'll have to travel to another village to get your groceries, and it will be at an inflated cost. We refuse to give you permission to bury your dead at the village graveyard." And then there were a few other "minor" privileges which would be lost.

This was a big deal. And what was the result of these threats? The Family said: we shall NOT pay. In spite of the attempt to intimidate, "our" believers were firm in their commitment to the Lord.

It is with little, if any, thought that we pick up the Bible and read a chapter at different times of the week. It's easy enough to do. The hard bit is having the right attitude when we do it. There are occasions when we are glad to do so, but then there may be situations when we do it with certain reluctance. It can be a chore.

There is a different side to the coin. The other day two sisters (I'm not sure if there is a blood tie, but they are in the same Family now) read the scripture as if they had a good educational background. So what? Go to any primary school and students do it all the time. Hold on, this time there is a difference. These two women, Merlin and Shamlah, have never been to a school in their lives. They did not know how to read Tamil before joining the group.

So Br Jacob asked them a logical question:- how come they could read suddenly, and not just read, but read the Scripture? As it turns out, they had been working hard for some time to learn to read Tamil. There was just one reason: they wished to read God's Word. They took time in the evenings after coming from work, and paid money (a third of their wage for 3 months!!) to someone to teach them. And now they read the Bible. How wonderful is that!

When Jackie, Jacob's wife, offered them her services as a teacher, they refused. The reason was simple (in their eyes). Since Jackie would not accept payment, they felt that they would not be dedicated learners. There needed to be a little "pain" to ensure ongoing motivation. Jacob is pleased to report that presently both of them read the Bible very well. As he says, "I was so amazed to know their desire and commitment in reading the Scripture." Would he be able to say the same of you?

Let me introduce one more person. Her name

is Sister Bhuvaneshvari (There are no prizes for being able to pronounce or remember the names correctly. We can rest assured that God knows His elect). This lady is the sister of a fellow (not a member of the gathering) whose wife fell sick and who asked Br Jacob to come and pray for them. And why wouldn't he ask? Mysticism is alive and well in India and you never know which god may come to the rescue.

Sister Bhuvaneshvari happened to be at the house when Jacob arrived. During the visit she remained standing near the door, watching and apparently absorbing the goings on.

'It is with little, if any, thought that we pick up the Bible and read a chapter at different times of the week. It's easy enough to do.'

Now, Sister Bhuvaneshvari had never (ever) heard about Christ before. Not even once. It hardly seems possible in today's high tech world, but there you have it. She was a complete foreigner to this gospel. But then, she had been brought up in a committed Hindu family. Well, she was obviously intrigued by what she heard, and so she asked Jacob for more information. One thing led to another, and soon there was evidence that God was working in her heart, making her receptive and believing of His Gospel. She started coming to the gathering.

Is this a nice story? Yes, at least for us it may seem that way. But this was only the beginning. When she started to come to the gathering her husband left her. Her brother, who had initially asked Br Jacob to pray for him, left her too. Apparently the mysticism didn't allow for too much fellowship with a strange God.

Then her eldest son fell mentally sick. Her other brothers refused to visit her, she was not invited to any family functions, and she was ridiculed by people at work who said she was a low caste. All in all, a series of nasty and hurtful experiences eventuated.

And yet, this 'babe' in the faith, in spite of all these difficulties and slanders, has been faithful in her commitment. The Lord continues to give her the strength to remain faithful. Praise is to Him Who remains by the side of His children.

The biggest problem with publishing mission anecdotes is that there is no end to the stories which

A few weeks ago there was no Bible Study club meeting for the Mt Nasura youth. Instead, an invitation was sent out to listen to a report by a certain Indian (from India, not America). His name: Br Jacob. (We haven't the room to share now how an Indian fellow ended up with such an English name - that's a story in itself). For those who don't know, Br Jacob is a mission worker who is busy spreading the gospel in India. He is supported by the Mt Nasura congregation. What we hope to do in this article is share some of the stories of the characters with which he mixes.

'Sister Muthammal lives with her uncle because her parents have refused to allow her in the house while she attends Christian worship services.'

Jacob tells us that there is a great commitment evident in the two places he works. People go to great lengths to participate in the Worship Services. Those who have been there and seen the services report amazing things. Amongst a gathering of 450 souls, not one will fall asleep. And it isn't because the benches are hard. (In fact, they sit on the floor.) It's because of this: their commitment. Here are some examples.

Some members of the gathering had jobs where they were forced to work on Sundays. But that didn't work. They needed to go to church. Now, a job in India is essential. You can't live on the dole. It doesn't exist. So, what to do?

Sister Shamlah is 19 years old and faced this