

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

# editorial

*"But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith" (2 Timothy 6:11-12a NIV).*

What an incredible period of time has passed since the last contender issue (and I am not talking about the two week delay)! The Federal Liberals regained the authority to lead the country, there were more rumours of wars, the Aussies won a cricket match in India, and we had an enjoyable time at congress. Many things have happened in the world in the last two months that may or may not have affected us, but this is not the point that I would like to reflect on about this particular time frame. The question I would like to raise is this: have we been training for God in the last two months?

The topic of training has been brought up at a couple of club meetings in West Kelmscott and also at the most recent congress which was held in Rockingham (at which the organisers, speakers and all involved did a marvellous job - thank you!). As such, a good deal of self analysing has been taking place, and in so doing has made a lot of us question ourselves. Are we really training? How can we train? And what tools and methods do we have available to use to train?

Training begins by regular obedience to Christ, by obeying his commands, praying for strength to work in His way, and on a regular basis going to Church to be strengthened by the Word. But is this enough? Do we need more? At the Rockingham Congress many different ways of training were presented and some were as

simple as reading a concordance along with Bible reading so as to be able to read what other parts of the Bible says on the one topic. A Bible dictionary can also be helpful to explain in more detail objects talked about in the Bible. It was emphasised that we should indeed do prep study and increase our studying (along with prayer) that we may learn more about the risen Saviour and therefore go out and fight the good fight of faith. For this is the point of our training: that we may fight and be ready to fight for Christ in this heathen and secular society. That we are prepared for the onslaughts from the devil and that we have a comfort in Christ that He is indeed preserving us. But this knowledge doesn't only come from going to Congress, reading the Contender and going to Church, but also through private Bible study done at home. We must really work at this and make this our priority in life for, as Psalm 113 says, we should praise the Lord, that His name be blessed forever.

Are you in training?

Frank Janssen

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 Dekker                      Bruce Huizinga  
Arend Witten                    Rose Vermeulen  
Frank Janssen                    Rosanne Numan

Editorial Address  
3187 Albany Highway Armadale 6112  
eric.dekker@frsa.asn.au

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in this edition

|                             |    |
|-----------------------------|----|
| editorial                   |    |
| Frank Janssen .....         | 1  |
| apostasy                    |    |
| Laurence Van der Plas ..... | 2  |
| luther and the reformation  |    |
| Philip Numan .....          | 4  |
| mission india               |    |
| Rosanne Numan .....         | 5  |
| the wall of jericho         |    |
| Arend Witten .....          | 8  |
| big ideas little words      |    |
| Eric Dekker .....           | 11 |

# fighting apostasy: lessons from elijah

"And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."  
1 Kings 17:1

Sometimes it seems as if the world around us is, quite literally, hell-bent on eroding all things 'Godly.' The mass media spurts out an ever-increasing stream of offensive content, seven day trading is becoming more popular, and thousands of infants are murdered through abortion. It's enough to make a Christian's heart sink with despair. More than 2850 years ago, Elijah observed a similar scene of prevailing godlessness in his society, as Baal worship became Israel's 'state religion.' Elijah, recognizing that Israel's Baal worship was a choice for Satan instead of God, prayed for a drought to expose the non-existence of Baal. Because the antithesis is at the heart of all spiritual conflicts, Elijah's response provides valuable lessons as to how we should respond to the apostasy around us.

This aroused God's anger, and 24 000 died in a plague. Gideon, in Judges 6, also tore down an altar to Baal. King Solomon's 700 wives and 300 concubines turned away his heart to the gods of their heathen nations (1 Kings 11). The use of the 'high places' built by Solomon to facilitate his idol worship continued, in varying degrees of intensity, amongst the subsequent kings of Israel and Judah. They reached their peak in the reign of Ahab.

Elijah's response (see 1 Kings 17:1) to this situation is remarkable. He did not engage in a protracted argument about the merits of Yahweh versus Baal. Instead, he brought the Word of the Lord, prophesying that there would be no dew or rain except by his own word. He sought to expose the non existence of Baal, not through debate, but rather through a demonstration of God's exclusive control in the very area of life that Israel had given to Baal. Why? Because "the earth is the Lord's and all its fullness" (Psalm 24:1). God created the world, and thus has complete control over it. We confess this in Lord's Day 10: "God's providence is His almighty and ever present power whereby, as with His hand, He still upholds heaven and earth and all creatures, and so governs them that leaf and blade, rain and drought (etc) ... come to us not by chance, but by His fatherly hand." The drought, prophesied by Elijah, showed that God alone controlled His creation.

'As God's bride, we must not flirt with the devil.'

What motivated Elijah to bring this prophecy? It appears that it was not a direct command from God. While God did later command Elijah to proclaim the end of the drought (1 Kings 18:1) and to confront Ahab about the theft of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21:17) we do not read of a divine instruction to proclaim the prophecy of 1 Kings 17:1. Rather, we learn from James 5:17a that "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain." The motivating factor for Elijah's prophecy was prayer.

"But surely", we are inclined to ask, "how could Elijah pray for a drought, knowing that it would bring suffering on both believers and unbelievers alike?" To answer this question, we can consider Lord's Day 45, which teaches that there are three elements belonging to a prayer that pleases God. The first is that we call upon God "... who has revealed Himself in His Word for all that He has commanded us to pray." God's revealed will, as contained in His Word,

'From an earth-bound perspective, God's people often seem powerless. But through prayer, they have access to His throne'

Elijah lived during a time of almost unprecedented godlessness within Israel. Thanks to the efforts of Jezebel, many of the priests of Yahweh had been massacred. King Ahab, under the influence of his wicked wife, had transformed Baal worship to the status of state religion. Like the other Canaanite gods, Baal was a force of nature personified. The Canaanites believed he controlled the rain, mist and dew, and they sought his blessings for good crops and harvests. By all accounts, the Canaanites had been agriculturally successful (recall the rich produce brought back by the spies in Numbers 13), and this may have played a role in Israel's turning to Baal. It is also highly likely that they were attracted by the 'liberated' manner in which Baal was worshiped. Baal, and his wife Astarte, were worshiped through sexual debauchery and prostitution. Under the guidance of Ahab and Jezebel, the Israelites had made the transition from serving Baal alongside Yahweh to serving Baal instead of Yahweh.

Israel's shift from Yahweh to Baal did not happen overnight. In fact, the origins of their idol worship can be traced back to before their entry into the Promised Land. Numbers 25:1-3 describes how, in committing adultery with the Moabites, the Israelites began to worship Baal of Peor.

# big ideas little words

I can appreciate literary ability. I love reading well written stuff. I love it when writers use clever phrases and a little alliteration to make their work that much easier and pleasurable to read. Because when something is pleasurable to read, it gets read.

What I don't like particularly is poppycock. I don't like reading stuff in which authors use their electronic thesaurus to find difficult alternatives to simple words. If I want to read big words I'll borrow the book of Mary Poppins from the library, and read "supercali-something-or-other" a few times. I don't like "jargonised" articles because I'm not a walking dictionary, and I don't read articles with a dictionary beside me.

In the last issue Hester Bax posed a question in a letter to the editor. In a nutshell, what she asked was this: should we use difficult words in articles, or should we use everyday language? It's a good question.

Claims are sometimes made that big words are necessary. And I agree - they are. There isn't a small word that quite matches the larger, ten letter word "nincompoop". So sometimes a big word needs to do. But is it necessary to use jargon? Because the difficulty with jargon is that it is often ambiguous, and no one really knows what you're saying. In answer to Hester, the bottom line is that what is written must be clear, understandable, and to the point.

A recent article making the rounds said the following: "When it came to clear communication, Jesus was a Master. Children and adults alike had no difficulty understanding His words or following His reasoning. This is remarkable because while He was on earth He lived in a society that had become accustomed to cliché-ridden religious double-talk. The scribes, priests, and Pharisees who dominated the synagogue scene in Palestine saw to that. They unintentionally made Jesus' simple style and straight-forward approach seem all the more refreshing. When He spoke, people listened. Unlike the pious professionals of His day, Jesus' words made sense.

This was never more true than when He sat down on the hillside with a group of His followers and talked about what really mattered. This teaching session has come to be known as the Sermon on the Mount. And those who listened sat spellbound to the end.

The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes. Matthew 7:28-29"

So, is there ever a time when technical terms need to be used? Of course! We speak of justification, sanctification, and there are a few more "...ations" too. But is it ever necessary to indulge in a passionate search through one's thesaurus in the hope that a 6 syllable word can be found to replace the clear 3 letter word that has always been fine to use? No, it's not.

Abraham Kuyper was a very intelligent man who was probably able to jargonise with the best of them. And yet, after meeting an uneducated miller's daughter called Pietje Baltus, he claimed that "in their simple language, they brought me to that absolute conviction in which alone my soul can find rest..."

'... is it ever necessary to indulge in a passionate search through one's thesaurus in the hope that a 6 syllable word can be found to replace the 3 letter word that has always been fine to use?'

Hendrik DeCock was an ill taught minister in Holland in 1834. And yet he became a founding father of a reformation at that time, once he'd been shown the full truths of the gospel. And one step on that road came from a common labourer. He kept telling De Cock that his instruction did no good because "Should I be required to contribute a mere sigh to my salvation, I would be forever lost". The man's name was Klaas Kuipenga, a simple, uneducated church member. He spoke simple words, but those words held profound truths.

You don't need to go so far back in history for examples. There is an internationally renowned theologian called Karl Barth. He tours universities and gives lectures to academics. Clever people. People who know big words. And yet, when once he was asked "Dr Barth, what is the most profound truth you have learned in your studies?" he replied without hesitation with 12 words, none of which was over 2 syllables long. The most profound thing he knew? "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Yes indeed, God reveals Himself in simple truths. Are concepts ever difficult? Sometimes, yes. But usually because people have made them so. Jesus used simple examples to explain difficult concepts. He spoke of Shepherds and coins and sheep. Everyday things. The Bible is full of simple truths. James 2: 13 supplies a beautiful insight of God's love using everyday language: "Mercy triumphs over judgement."

So, next time you write, don't be afraid to be normal. Don't try to dazzle anyone (or yourself) with your eloquence, but rather be prepared to speak the truth simply. Leave the religious gobbly-gook to scribes and Pharisees. The truth just isn't that hard or complicated.

"these are Gods gifts to you, so don't forget to be humble about them and THANK Him for them".

Discussion followed as to what can be done with these gifts.

1. Bury them, sit on them or kick back and take it easy - after all, the world owes you a living!
2. Use them for yourself - because they belong to you after all!
3. Think about ways you could use them to please the Lord.

After all, God gave your talents to you and they are very important. He loves you and you are precious to Him. So therefore use them to the glory of His Holy Name.

How to do this?

- " Recognise God has given us special gifts.
- " Read the Bible regularly. Learn about God. Learn what God wants from you.
- " Pray after you have read the Word.
- " Make a commitment - ask the Lord for His blessing
- " Focus on one thing. Do one thing properly rather than many things sloppily.
- " Then do it - one small step at a time. Don't get frustrated.
- " Thank God that He has allowed you to use that gift to His glory.

The audience were separated into groups of about 10 and

Janelle vanBurgel

## letter to the editor

I write in response to a letter written by Ed Schoof, published in the On the Other Hand section of the last Contender.

Apparently a guy asked Ed 'Why aren't you a sect?' When Ed answered that a sect follows a particular person who claims to be the chosen one and does extreme things, the guy said Ed must belong to a sect because he follows Jesus, a chosen one, and because Ed does extreme things like going to Church every Sunday and doesn't believe in sex before marriage, etc. So now Ed asks how to answer that, and what's the difference between us and a sect.

I think the problem here is that Ed gave a sort of dictionary definition of sect and then found himself in hot water however the Bible teaches that a sect is any group which breaks away from the Church of the Lord Jesus. Article 29 of the Belgic Confession says that the true Church "must be distinguished from all sects that call themselves the church". So a

'... the question is really whether it is the Church of the Lord or whether it isn't.'

Philip Numan

had to brainstorm as to how to use talents in the church, community or politics. Once these ideas were formulated each person could privately nominate one to do if they were forced to do it. Certainly thought provoking!

There are many things that can be done with our talents and there were definitely many talents among these 150 young people. It was said that each talent will make a difference and therefore we were encouraged not to let our talents be choked because of worldly cares. We are to use our talents for God's kingdom - for the King is coming and He will be looking for a harvest! We were encouraged to reflect on this thought quietly for a moment and to consider what personal commitment we were willing to make?

To round off the evening a huge thank you was given to the SPYSC team and Mr Bergsma for their wonderful efforts in organising the evening. Everyone should certainly support them in their work. However, most importantly thanks belong to God who gave His children so many talents. May they certainly never stop being used to His glory and for the coming of His Kingdom.

sect seems to be a 'sect'-ion of people which have broken away from the true Church.

I think that using words like 'extreme' get us bogged down. The guy that talked to Ed reckons going to church every Sunday and not having sex before marriage is 'extreme'. We don't say it is extreme, for we know it is what God wants. So instead of using words like 'extreme' it is better to say whether something 'is' or 'isn't' according to God's Word because then you've got the right standard to measure things against.

The Pharisees called the followers of the Lord Jesus a sect but really the Pharisees had become a sect because they didn't believe that Jesus was the Son of God. This shows that you've got to see what God says if you want to know what is and is not a sect.

I used to think that there was the true church which the Lord Jesus Christ gathers (LD 21) and then there was the false church which had gone off the rails and then there was the sect which took a really extreme position. But I now see that the question is really whether it is the Church of the Lord or whether it isn't. If a Church goes its own way, then (as we confess in Art. 29 BCF) it has become a false church (or, in other words, a sect).

must form the basis for our prayers. While Elijah's 'Bible' would have been significantly smaller than ours, the principle of praying on the basis of God's promises still applies. Deuteronomy 28, for instance, contains an exhaustive list of blessings that would be incurred by obedience, and also a list of curses that would be incurred by disobedience. Elijah knew that Israel's Baal worship would bring God's wrath, that God would let Israel become subservient to other nations and scatter her abroad. Elijah wanted Israel to return to worshipping Yahweh, so he prayed for a drought to demonstrate both the futility of Baal worship and God's displeasure with Israel's idolatry.

In this way Elijah's prophecy was closely tied to the covenant. Because Israel was God's covenant nation, God did not respond to their disobedience with fire and brimstone, as He did to Sodom and Gomorrah. The drought prophesied by Elijah showed God's anger at Israel's covenant breaking, but at the same time it also showed God's patient love for His people. Out of love, God did not want His people to serve Baal, but to return to Him.

Three and a half years later, the return came. Elijah assembled the Israelites at Mount Carmel, and God revealed His majesty by consuming the offering on Elijah's altar. Sadly, whilst the futility of Baal worship was exposed, King Ahab continued in his unbelief. Despite later warnings from the prophet Micaiah (1 Kings 22), the Israelites gradually returned to Baal worship. Within 200 years the Assyrians captured them, and the ten tribes were scattered abroad.

So, what can we learn from Elijah's response to Israel's idolatry? There are three main lessons.

The first is that the antithesis - the struggle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent - lies at the heart of all religious conflicts. The conflict faced by Elijah was not one between God and Baal, but between God and Satan. We live in a post-modern society that believes in a plurality of truths, and that labels as bigoted anyone who asserts otherwise. When different religions are discussed, they are often compared as if they are somehow on equal footing. Many, for instance, have fallen into the trap of comparing the Bible with other 'holy books', such as the Koran, as if they are all equally true. But they aren't! "Thus says the Lord ...", we read in Isaiah 44:6, "... I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God." Knowing that today's spiritual conflicts are between followers of God and followers of Satan gives us immense comfort, for we know that Jesus Christ has conquered the devil. Our enemy is already defeated.

'The conflict faced by Elijah was not one between God and Baal, but between God and Satan.'

Israel's transition to Baal worship also teaches us a very important lesson about the way in which we worship

God today. As we have seen, the switch from Yahweh to Baal did not take place overnight. It was a gradual process. Before breaking the second commandment by bowing to the images of Baal, the Israelites broke the first commandment by tolerating other gods alongside Yahweh. Today too, God does not want us to include worldly practices, no matter how well intentioned, in our worship of Him. We are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, (God's) own special people ..." (1 Peter 2:9). As God's bride, we must not flirt with the devil.

'The world around us is ... enough to make a Christian's heart sink with despair.'

Finally, Elijah's response to Israel's apostasy illustrates the power of prayer. From an earth-bound perspective, God's people often seem powerless. But through prayer, they have access to His throne! When we ask God to manifest His power, so that those around us will return to Him, we too may be asking for unpleasant experiences. In Revelation 8 we read that the prayers of the saints are offered to God in a golden censer with the smoke of incense. But we also read that as a result, the censer is filled with fire and thrown to the earth, followed with "noises, thunderings, lightnings and an earthquake" (Revelation 8:5). When the saints of God pray, their prayers may also play a part in initiating God's judgment on unbelief.

Thus we can identify the apostasy in the world today for what it really is. The antithesis, which was at the heart of Elijah's struggle with Ahab, is still at the heart of the Church's conflict with the world. Satan, having been cast out of Heaven, prowls around on this earth trying to devour as many of God's children as he can, using all the forms of deceit he can muster. Today, he tries to lead God's children away by encouraging them to include modern idols in their life, with the aim of leading them away from God and his gospel of free grace. To detect and resist Satan's attacks, we need to nourish a living faith. And when, like Elijah, we are concerned by the apostasy around us we can come before our Heavenly Father in prayer. When we ask God to stem the tide of apostasy and bring glory to His name, then we need not fear the physical sufferings that we may have to endure. For when Christ returns on the clouds of heaven, He will banish Satan for eternity, and we will be able to serve God in perfection.

Laurence Van der Plas

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# luther and the reformation

We've passed October 31st and probably not even realised its significance - Reformation Day. At least, there was nothing in the newspaper to remind us about it. Yet it is a day in particular when we remember how the Lord used Martin Luther to confront the Church with its wrong practices. As we know, this led to the Reformation. And this Reformation had a tremendous influence on Europe and on countries settled by Europeans, such as USA and even Australia. The word reformation itself means to restore into "the original form". The Church had to be restored to faithfulness to God's Word. And not just the Church but all of life. So what led this man Luther to be an instrument in God's hand?

Luther was born on the tenth of November 1483. At the age of twenty two he was caught in a thunder storm. He was so terrified that he vowed to Saint Mary that if he was spared he would become a monk. Luther was petrified of God's judgement day. He realised that he was very sinful and continually tortured himself, fasted and prayed in the hope of being saved. But no matter how he punished and afflicted himself from early morning till late at night he could not be sure that he would be saved.

Reading the book of Romans he came across the words "the just shall live by faith". He thought about them much and, through the grace of God, he began to see that people could not earn their own salvation. All they needed to do was believe that salvation came through Jesus Christ's perfect payment.

'We've passed October 31st and probably not even realised its significance - Reformation Day.'

In those days John Tetzel began to go throughout Germany selling salvation in the form of indulgences. These indulgences allowed you to indulge in sins and then pay money to be 'forgiven'. Luther was appalled by what was happening for it was clear to him that it was contrary to Scripture.

Luther wanted to debate this matter and other issues and therefore he wrote his ninety five theses (statements) which he nailed to the door of the Church on October 31st 1517. Instead of being debated in public, the theses were copied and sent throughout Germany.

In the years following the nailing up of the ninety five theses (1517-1520) Luther continued to study. His understanding grew and he came to realise more and more that only through Christ's one sacrifice on the cross are we

saved. He studied both Church History and the Bible. He also wrote many books and papers against the Roman Catholic Church and the pope.

'Luther understood a very important part of scripture which is that we are saved by grace alone and not of ourselves.'

When the pope first heard about Martin Luther and what he had done he did not think much of it and dismissed it by saying it was just a little monk's dispute. However, Luther's teachings did not fizzle out but rather spread throughout the country. The pope could no longer ignore what was happening and thought the best way would be to make Luther retract his teachings. He issued a Papal Bull against Luther. This papal bull was like the first step of excommunication. In this bull the pope told Luther that he must retract his teachings along with 41 of his writings. Luther, however, did not even consider retracting his teachings but on the day he was to reply to the pope he burned the Papal Bull in public. He did not stop there; Luther wrote against the pope and called him an antichrist.

Luther was then summoned to a Diet (meeting) of Worms (a city) where Luther declared that he would not retract his teachings unless they could prove him wrong from Scripture because only to Scripture would he submit. The Pope then excommunicated him on the third of January 1521.

Luther travelled home an excommunicated member and also outlawed. His travel was therefore unsafe and he was kidnapped. However, his kidnappers were not enemies but rather his friends who wanted to protect him. They took him away to a hideout, a castle at Wartburg, under the name of Squire George. There he continued his studies and translated the New Testament from Greek into German so that in 1534 the whole Bible was written in German.

Luther was an instrument in the Lord's hand which the Lord used in the reformation of the Church. There were many other reformers in the Church in many countries. Luther understood a very important part of Scripture which is that we are saved by grace alone and not of ourselves. The Lord did not only inspire Luther but others such as Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin. Through these and others the Lord reformed the Church in the 1500's and continues to do so today whenever people submit to God's Word alone.

Philip Numan

# youth club and spysc meeting

The 8 o'clock chime on Friday 20th August 2004 was complimented with an eager bunch of about 150 youth from all the metropolitan churches being gathered in the Kelmscott Church Building. The SPYSC Committee was thankful to have found Mr Ron Bergsma willing to address us with a topic about the priorities in our lives.

The speech began with questions such as: what's life about? What makes you feel good? What gives you a real buzz? Is it your job, girlfriend, hanging out with mates? Is your focus in life 'me based' and do you reason within yourself saying "it's my time isn't it?" In fact is there even a hidden thought: "if it doesn't do anything for me then I won't do it".

Mr Bergsma rightly pointed out the motto of millions of people: "I'm celebrating life" or "It's about life, it's about me". Even the youth would be able to testify that their neighbours and work mates were obviously enjoying life. And surely ... millions of people can't be wrong can they?!

'The Christian motto should read, "above all it's about God" rather than the world's motto which is saying, "above all it's about me"'

The SPYSC Committee had arranged a multi-media projector in order to visualise some of the current Television ads shown. For example a Telstra ad showing a young vibrant couple throwing a Frisbee to each other on the beach. This, Mr Bergsma explained, had the message that if you log on with Telstra, life will feel like a beach for good-looking young girls or guys. Or secondly, a Midalia steel ad portraying an attractive lady drilling into steel while a good-looking guy watches. The steel will somehow make you independent and cause your relationships to flourish. In short: use the product or connect to Telstra and your life will be wonderful, beyond imagination. Once again it's all about me. A couple of other ads were played which also confirmed the idea that you will either become good looking, confident, happier, etc if you purchased the particular product. Quite simply, the sky is the limit. Do as the advertisements suggest and you'll be more fulfilled!

The unspoken messages became quite obvious. But were the messages true? May we accept them numbly as simple advertisements for various products and services?

Mr Bergsma encouraged the audience to take their Bibles and discover, most importantly, what the Bible says about the priorities in life. Mark 4: The sower went out to sow. We

read that God sows the seed and we, as youth of the Church, hear the preaching. After hearing it we may even say "how nice" or "interesting sermon" or even "relevant topic". But the parable continues, stating that sometimes the word falls among the thorns and the crop bears no yield. In relation to this topic the desires of riches choke the world. Thoughts similar or along the lines of: "Sorry Lord, I'm too busy with the cares of the world" or "one day I'll have a bit of time for You" may enter our minds. These seeds didn't have time to be nurtured by the Word of God and they died a spiritual death.

There are many passages of Scripture which we can look to for guidance in order to escape the "me nature". Some examples turned to were James 3:14 - 'But if you have ... self seeking in your hearts...'; 1 Cor 10:24 - 'Let no-one seek his own, but each one the other's wellbeing ...'; Romans 15:2,3 - 'Let each one of us please his neighbour for his good ... for even Christ did not please Himself ...'; Matt 6:19 - 'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy...'; and Matt 6:33 - 'But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...'

We could see the over-riding theme that we need to be busy promoting God's kingdom rather than being transfixed with things of the present. The Christian motto should read, "above all it's about God" rather than the world's motto which is saying, "above all it's about me".

Mr Bergsma and the SPYSC Committee distributed a Self-analysis sheet on 'How do I spend my time?' All were encouraged to write the number of hours spent on certain activities and on which days these activities were carried out. Each activity then had to be sorted in descending order in terms of hours spent. In other words how many hours are spent watching TV, surfing the net, learning your Catechism, and studying God's Word? And even more importantly what is the ratio of these hours?

'... these are Gods gifts to you, so don't forget to be humble about them and THANK Him for them.'

Secondly, a sheet of various personal qualities was passed out. People were to pick six of their most prominent qualities. It was then to be passed on to a friend for them to pick 6 qualities that they thought you are good at. Quite obviously the participants pass on their sheets to friends hoping that the friends will think the same of them as what they thought of themselves. However, Mr Bergsma had, for good reason, printed a very important message on these sheets:

inserting communist party members into leadership positions in the Church. As you can imagine unanimous non-cooperation and widespread protest forced them to modify their approach. The Stasi went about identifying those Pastors who appeared to be less hostile to the regime. These men they encouraged by "friendly material help" (i.e. bribes) to adopt a more "progressive" approach to the state and to encourage others to do likewise. The government also attempted to drive wedges between the Church leadership. In 1958 they organised a Christian Peace Conference in Prague. However, only Pastors who were compliant to the regime were invited, giving the impression of distinct factions.

For the first twenty years of the communist regime the Church appears to have held out relatively well, membership was still high and most Church leaders still took a firm stand in condemning atheistic communism. At this stage the Communist government changed tactics again. Instead of outright hostility toward the Church they began to grant some limited freedoms. They formally recognised the Church as an independent organization (the only one in the country) and allowed for members of the Church Youth groups to attend state Secondary schools.

The government strategy was to grant limited concessions and then pressure the Church leaders to adopt a line of political loyalty and to calm the more turbulent spirits in their midst with the threat that any outspoken opposition might endanger this fragile tolerance they were enjoying.

After twenty years the government's tactics appear to have begun bearing fruits. The Church leadership became more accommodating toward communism. The catch phrase for many Pastors was no longer "the Church against communism" but "the Church within communism". Church membership also began a rapid decline. Particularly the young people with less exposure to Christian instruction at school began to move away from the Church. It is saddening to read a secular historian write how many Protestant Churches sought to "widen their appeal to young people". In the mid-sixties one Church began introducing Jazz music, Negro spirituals and Blues to the worship services. The services were often begun and concluded with dancing and what one observer describes as "beat-music". A Stasi agent assigned to monitor this Church's activities seems to have had more insight into the matter than the Church leadership itself. He writes in a report that "the majority of young people attending these services have few if any links with the church and in no way possess religious sensibilities. These youngsters come purely out of interest in modern music."

In these descriptions we recognise distinct signs of religious deformation. There was doctrinal error, world conformity and declining membership. The Protestant Church in Germany (where the spark that began the Great Reformation originated centuries before) seemed to be on the brink of extinction. The Berlin Wall stood as a barrier between the Church and religious freedom of western Europe, subjecting them to the Satanic efforts of the communist government. From a human perspective, in the 1980s it seemed that if the Berlin Wall wasn't knocked down soon and democratic religious freedom granted the Church would not survive.

Joshua might have thought the same gazing at the tall high walls of Jericho. If this wall could not be broken down the grumbling rebellious people would probably return to the desert or to Egypt and disperse and live among other peoples. Israel, the chosen people of God would cease to exist.

Thanks be to God who intervenes in the course of history to preserve for Himself a Church on earth.

Historians have given various reasons why the Wall in Berlin was breached: Changing power politics in the USSR, a mass resistance groups in East Germany, the diplomacy of U.S. President. Surprisingly all the historical explanations seem to have two things in common. Firstly the fall of the Berlin was not expected by any of the communist authorities and secondly it happened with amazing speed.

On the first Monday night of October 1989 a large group of people took to the streets in the East German city of Leipzig protesting the recently rigged elections and demanding reforms. The protest ended peacefully and they agreed to do the same thing next week. However, the East German leadership was informed and made preparations to suppress this rally by force. The East German leader ordered the army to be prepared to break up the demonstration "with live ammunition if necessary." Yet somewhere down the chain of command his order was countermanded. A curious thing happened: over 100,000 people marched through the streets of Leipzig, but the police and army simply seemed to melt away. The demonstration again concluded peacefully. The following week a quarter of a million people were emboldened to take to the streets in Leipzig. Marches began to spread also to other towns around the country. Faced with this level of opposition without the support of their usual instruments of violent repression the East German leadership was divided on how to respond. In the first days of November the government announced a series of sweeping reforms such as freedom of press, the promise of democratic elections and the freedom to travel for 30 days to West Germany. The protests however, continued unabated. On the 4th of November over a million people gathered on the streets of Berlin. On the 9th of November rumours spread that a government official had sanctioned the breaching of the wall. Literally millions of people in East and West Berlin climbed on the wall and with sludge hammers and pikes began to reduce it to rubble. The East German border guards unsure of their orders simply looked on.

The 9th of November is called by Germans, "the turning point". Two million people from East Germany visited West Germany in the first weekend after the wall was breached. Serious infighting raged within the communist leadership. It was only a matter of time before at the invitation of the West German Chancellor, East Germans voted in overwhelming support of reunification with the West. The East was swallowed up in the West.

In a very brief time the persecution suffered by the East German Church for 40 years was over. Once again religious freedom was proclaimed in the East and the embattled Church was able to live in peace and security.

Arend Witten

# on a mission mission india revs up

**J**acob. The name is familiar. After all, there have been a few articles written about the work that he does in India. (Remember the persecution campaign in Karanai?)

*Br Jacob and his family were recently in Australia. During their stay our brother was examined by Classis. He passed the examination and was ordained as "Missionary" on Sunday, 24 October 2004. Our brother (Rev) Jacob enters a new chapter of his life, though definitely no easier than before. Despite the difficulties he has to face, and will no doubt continue to face, we can be extremely thankful that he approaches his God-given task humbly, acknowledging that not a hair can fall from our head without our Father's will.*

*I thought it might be appropriate to ask some questions of someone who has been involved with Jacob a lot. Here is Mr Koens' response.*

Rosanne Numan

## How did Mission India start?

It all began in November 1991. All the Australian churches then supported mission work in Papua New Guinea. However, that work didn't go that well and the consistory of Bedfordale appointed a Mission Review Committee. Consistory also believed that every church should have its own mission field, if possible. The task of this committee was to find a new mission field, anywhere.

So we wrote here and there (we even went to Indonesia) and then, via a contact through a newspaper article in the West Australian, we got in touch with a missionary named Gallipolli in India - in Andhra Pradesh state in the city Radjahmundry. After a dozen letters to and fro we recommended to consistory that we pay him a visit since that was the only way to make a responsible decision, either to continue or to cut the relationship. Consistory wasn't comfortable with it and this lead petered out. In hindsight this was the right thing to do - but that's another story.

We then got a letter from Jacob who had heard from someone that we had been 'sniffing around' in his country. He asked for some literature on mission. We wrote back and quite an extensive correspondence ensued. We encouraged him to remain 'Biblical' when he was lecturing Old Testament and Hebrew at a Theological College in Madras (Chennai). When he was required to sign, indicating his agreement with their modern teachings, he refused and lost his job as a consequence. Meanwhile, consistory Bedfordale had decided to quit the investigations on India and once more support PNG.

Since we felt responsible for Jacob's unemployed-plight, we formed a support group to allow Jacob to study for two years for his Masters of Theology (specialising in O.T.). He already had Bachelor of Theology and Bachelor of Divinity degrees. For the latter he studied in Calcutta and for his 'hands-on' unit (part of the course) he worked at Mother

Theresa's Home for the Dying.

Towards the end of these two years my wife and I visited Jacob in Madras and Bangalore. We had a most interesting and wonderful time. On behalf of the Support Group we wrote a long and detailed report (you're welcome to read it) and presented this to the consistories of Bedfordale and Byford who also were interested.

## How did Jacob become Mt. Nasura's missionary?

In response, consistory Bedfordale felt that this opportunity could not be ignored. They followed the recommendations of the Support Group and went through our correspondence and sent two brothers to verify our findings. They came back quite positive and after only six months the Church of Bedfordale formalised relations with Jacob. All things considering, this relatively speedy development was nothing short of a miracle.

A mission committee was formed and for the first meetings no minutes were kept - only private notes. The first Newsletter was published in March 1998. I remember thinking, 'I wonder whether we'll ever get to no. 10'. Because 'Mission India' is so different and so eventful, there's always a lot to write. Next Sunday we're hoping to publish no. 111.

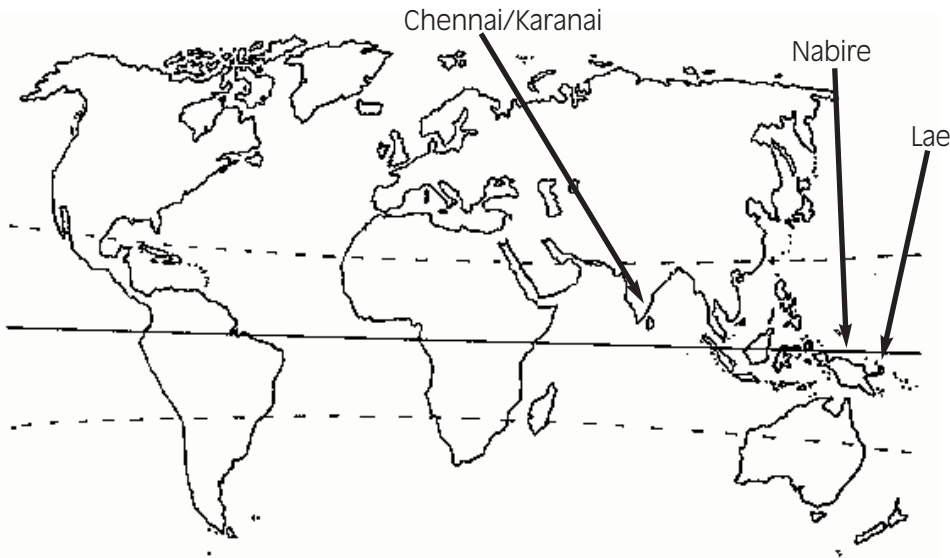
On October 5, 1998, the Jacob family came here for 3 months. They lived in Fair Haven. When they returned to India, Jacob first had contacts in a town called Tiruvallur and that's where they settled. After he was physically threatened the family shifted to Chennai where he also had a few contacts.

## Did Mount Nasura have specific expectations?

Mount Nasura's consistory was, in the first place, conscious of her responsibility to have a faithful man preaching the Gospel in India. That was the reason for his visit to Australia before we permitted him to engage in preaching the Gospel. As for specific expectations, we didn't have any - we simply planned as much as we could and left things to the Lord. As it turned out, He indeed did direct things. In hindsight we see that the timetable was of His making and that the people who came were called by Him. That was especially true with the story on how the work in Karanai started and developed. We built a small church after the work there had only been going two months! That's been the story of mission India: we considered and God decided. That was true then and is still true today.

## What are the implications of Jacob's ordination?

Quite a lot of work has been done on, what we call, the 'post-ordination' process. We've been advised by some ex-missionaries but, in many respects, 'Mission India' is unique in its culture and the large number of people that attend the services in two locations. From our perspective, Indian people have a very receptive mindset to religion - something that's linked to Hinduism.



Another implication is Jacob's changed (formal) position. After ordination (should he successfully complete classis exam) we have certain obligations according to the church order. Hereby we formalise his position. This will also enable him to administer the sacraments.

**India is so culturally different. Has it taught us a lot?**

Yes, I think we have learnt a lot about India - her religion and culture. We've learnt to accept the ways things are done there - but - only up to a point. It has taught us not to insist nor expect a duplicate of our churches here. As we operate in our cultural setting and are linked to our history, so our Indian brothers and sisters operate

in their culture and are linked to their past. In addition, most also have to put Hinduism behind them! Reading the Book of Acts and the Letters to (newly established) churches in Asia Minor can help us a lot in this regard.

Above all, we realise that we must work together on the basis of the Word of God, that's our common foundation. If we seek the advancement of the work of the Lord, we simply can't go wrong.

In all, 'Mission India' has been (and still is) a truly amazing story. With confidence we continue in the strength of God. After all, it's His business.

Mr Koens

As you'll understand, when adults are baptised they also profess their faith. This, in turn, requires them to have knowledge. How much? When adults become baptised they become a member of The Church. And the church, as we find it here on earth, has office bearers: elders and deacons. How do we go about that? Therefore we have to understand and consider the Biblical, confessional and cultural implications before we make responsible decisions.

In all this we haven't even talked about whether all the children of parents who seek baptism should also receive baptism. Sure, that's easy when they are 2 years old but what about when they are 18? So you can see that we have much to consider. But they are beautiful things to consider because it means faith, sown some years before, has grown and is maturing - that's wonderful!

## on the other hand

The sign read "If God seems distant, who has moved?"

1. Is God ever really far away, or is it only our perception?
2. If God seems distant and we're concerned about that, does that mean we're actually a lot closer than we think?

What do you think? SHORT responses (about 150 words) to be emailed to [eric.dekker@frsa.asn.au](mailto:eric.dekker@frsa.asn.au)

Eric Dekker

## albany easter congress 2005

Rockingham Conference is over, and the team did an awesome job! Now it's time to start preparing yourself for another jam-packed weekend of Christian fellowship and fun ... Albany Easter Congress, 2005!

Please contact your club secretary if you haven't received any info yet.

Vivian Bax, Charlene Hordyk & Kathryn van der Schaaf

## the people shouted and the wall came down

This November a very special celebration is taking place in Germany. November the 9th is the 15th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The story of this wall is not so familiar to our generation. Yet for God's people this day 15 years ago has a unique significance that is not understood by the unbelievers. It is a story worth telling.

You would have recognised the title of this article as reference to another story of a wall being knocked down; the Jericho Wall. Jericho was the first city on the west side of the Jordan that the Israelites had to conquer to enter the Promised Land. Jericho stood as a gate barring the entrance. If the Israelites were unable to conquer Jericho it is unlikely that they would be able to even enter into the Promised Land at all. All God's promises to His chosen people would seem to have come to nothing. They would have had to return to the Wilderness and would no longer become a great nation like He had said. The story of the defeat of Jericho is therefore a story of the fulfilment of God's purpose for His Church.

In the secular media we can often read articles that use biblical quotes as sensational catch phrases. We know that the Bible must be treated with respect and reverence. Reducing God's Holy Word to nothing more than a slogan is blasphemy.

However, by using this title for the story of the Berlin Wall I wish to make a connection between the Berlin Wall and the Jericho Wall. In recounting the story of the Berlin Wall I hope to make clear how desperately this wall, too, needed to be knocked down for the sake of God's Church. The fall of the Berlin wall, like the fall of the Jericho wall, was a pivotal event in the history of God's people in that place. Therefore the story of the Berlin Wall has a unique meaning to God's people because it testifies of God's abiding care and love for His people, even in the most adverse circumstances.

Fifteen years ago Germany was a very different place than it is today. In fact it is more accurate to speak not of Germany but of Germanys: plural. After the end of the Second World War and the defeat of Hitler, the Allied forces occupied Germany. The eastern half of Germany was occupied by Russia (at this time a communist country called the USSR) and the other Allies, France, Britain and the U.S, occupied the western half. But the necessary alliance that the western half of Europe and the United States had enjoyed with the USSR during the fight against Hitler turned sour after the War. The former Allies began to fight for control of Europe in a conflict now known as the Cold War. Germany itself was split in two. The East side became a communist country (like Russia) and the West side a democracy (like the United States). Down the middle of country ran a tall barbed-wire fence separating the Eastern and Western side. The German capital city of Berlin, which fell in the East side, was also split in two. Half belonging to the West and half to the East. The East German government built a large concrete wall in Berlin to prevent their citizens from leaving to the West. No one could get in or out without permission.

Many people in East Germany did not want to be living in that country. Because it was communist the eastern half of Germany was cut off from the World markets and so remained very poor. East Germans heard stories that in the western half of Germany things were much better. And they certainly were. By hard work, and trading with countries like the United States, West Germany went from being the defeated country of Hitler to the third strongest economy in the world in under 20 years.

In order to prevent their citizens from rebelling, the communist government in East Germany established a repressive secret police force that spied on the people and punished anyone who spoke out against what was going on in East Germany. This secret police force was known in German as the Stasi. Since the fall of the Berlin wall the Stasi archives have been opened and now historians know much more about how they did their work. In 1988 they employed over 108,000 fulltime agents. You may know of the terrible work of Hitler's secret police force, the Gestapo. Yet, terrible though it was, Hitler only employed 15,000 Gestapo agents to cover a much larger area. The annual budget for the Stasi in 1988 was 4 billion dollars (while many citizens lived in poverty). In this same year the Stasi held files containing information on the lives of three quarters of the adult population in East Germany. Today if you lived in East Germany you are able to ask to see your file. Many of them are quite comical. They gave secret code names to all of their suspects. Timothy Ash, a British reporter in East Germany, was called Romeo, because he drove an Alfa Romeo. They even collected people's smells in jam jars. They would come past after you had been sitting on a chair and somehow extract the smell to be kept to prime search dogs should the need arise to track you down.

And while some of it sounds funny, the terrible suffering through imprisonment, torture and economic persecution caused by the Stasi's activities, particularly to the Church, is no laughing matter. When the communist government came into power in 1946 they immediately came into conflict with the Church. Communism and Christianity cannot exist in the same place at the same time peacefully. In the first months of coming into power they abolished all religious schools. The "secular" education of the children was the responsibility of the State. Communism demands the complete loyalty of people, something that those who are loyal to Jesus Christ cannot offer.

All organizations had to be approved by the Government. The communists had one youth organization called the Free German Youth, all other organizations were considered illegal. Many young people who refused to disband their Church youth group were expelled from Secondary schools and barred from any Tertiary education. In an organised communist economy the employment of everyone is also controlled by government agencies. These young people were left to work in the most undesirable of vocations without any opportunity of advancement.

The Government also tried to take control of the leadership of the Church. This was at first tried directly by