

A U S T R A L I A N

Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

november 2002



Islam

AND THE CHURCH

Terrorism: No fear • Hole at our heart • A testing case

Presbyterian Theological Centre

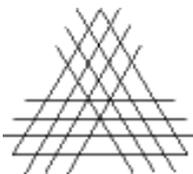
Position of Principal and Lecturer in Old Testament

The present term of the Principal and lecturer in Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis at the Presbyterian Theological Centre, Sydney, concludes on 31 December 2003. Accordingly the Theological Education Committee invites applications for appointment to this position. The position is full-time, normally for terms of six years, effective from 1 January 2004.

The present incumbent is eligible for reappointment and has indicated his intention to reapply.

Applicants must hold a research Masters degree or higher in a relevant area, and preferably have pastoral and teaching experience. Applicants should provide full curricula vitae and the names of three persons from whom a written report evaluating their suitability for this position (academically, educationally and pastorally) may be sought. Applicants must subscribe to the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian Church. The successful applicant may be required to teach some classes in areas other than Old Testament.

Applications should be sent to the address below to arrive before 31 January 2003. Inquiries should also be directed as below:



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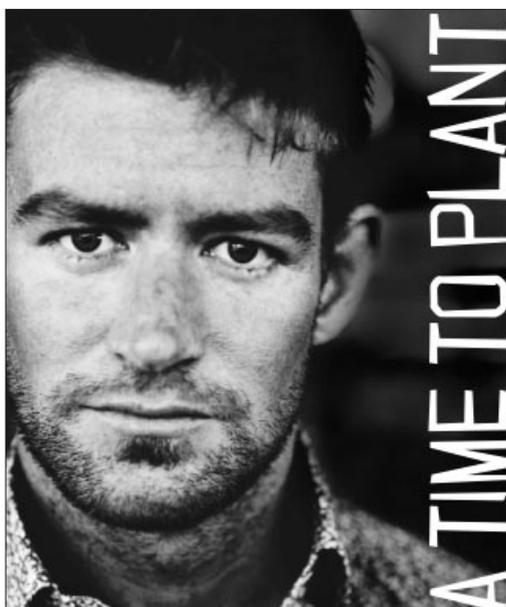
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editorial

‘Unholy row: legal first as Muslims accuse Christians of hate.’ So read the front page of Melbourne’s *Herald Sun* newspaper as it covered the Islamic Council of Victoria’s claim that a local Christian group vilified Muslims and its complaint to the Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission. These events signal that the relationship between Islam and Christianity is entering a new stage, the exact shape of which is yet to become clear. As we ponder these things we need to remember that Islamic people have long been part of the Australian community, of course, and have made an important contribution to the development of our country.

The vast majority of Westerners have at least a nominal Christian background. We have become more aware of Islam than perhaps ever before in our history. The arrival of migrants of various kinds from Islamic countries, awareness of fundamentalist groups such as the Taliban, the endless, bloody strife in the Middle East, the zealous efforts of well-known converts to Islam such as Yusuf Islam (aka ‘60s pop-star Cat Stevens) – let alone the dictatorships of countries like Syria, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, and September 11 – have all contributed to a rising consciousness of the religion of Mohammed. While it is good that “moderate” Islamic people in the West distance themselves and their religion from the dreadful extremism found elsewhere, in the popular mindset, Islam is being increasingly perceived as a religion that seems associated with terrible acts of indiscriminate terrorism and has a medieval attitude towards civil rights and religious freedom.

There is a lot that Christians need to learn about Islam and Muslims, that our understanding of those who read the Qur’an would be based on truth and love, not misrepresentations born of ignorance and fear. Ultimately Christians seek to bring the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ to all people including those of Islamic background and upbringing. For we believe that he was right when he said of himself “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me” (John 14:6). This issue of *AP* seeks to make a small contribution to this central task of the Church.



A fighting faith

Islam is often uncompromising. That could mean problems in Australia.



Trying to understand the religion of Islam and the mindset of Muslim radicals has become an urgent issue for Christians and non-Islamic governments around the world. More than a billion people are said to be followers of the prophet Mohammed, and the number continues to rise.

After the attack on the World Trade Centre and the recent bombing in Bali, it becomes more urgent than ever to understand the modern Muslim mind.

Here, *AP* talks to Zahir Ahmed, the president of Combined Multicultural Christian Community of NSW and pastor to the Christian City Church International (Baptist Churches of NSW), who addressed a public meeting held in the NSW Parliament building on September 11 this year.

Can you tell us of your background in Islam?

I grew up as a Muslim boy. My parents were Muslims, although they weren't devout. You'd call them nominal because they followed all the customs that Islam



Zahir Ahmed talks to AP

requires. So right from my childhood, as soon as I could read and write, I had to sit with a Muslim priest (or mullah) so he could teach me how to read the Qur'an. He would come every morning. I would sit with him for at least an hour each morning at our home, with my brothers and sisters. My parents paid him. He taught us seven days a week how to read the Qur'an. That was how I learnt Islam.

Does this happen to all Muslim children?

Yes, whether they are nominal or not, it is expected. Some people may not be able to do it due to the lack of money, but nevertheless it is a desire. Muslim societies also have something called the *madrassa*. It's like a theological institution – but not nearly as sophisticated as in the Western world. They are usually set up in villages

and in other places where the mullahs come at a specific time each day. On average 50 to 60 children might come for a couple of hours. The village people find it a relatively easy and inexpensive way to instruct their children. Wealthy Saudis and others pour millions of dollars every year into funding madrassas, particularly in other countries like Pakistan, where they become the breeding grounds of militant Islam.

What's it like to grow up in an Islamic culture?

At the time I loved it. Islam gave me some very strong ideals. As a Muslim boy I had deep aspirations: how can I best serve Islam? How best can I serve my Muslim country? And I decided as a boy that I would be an officer in the army. I wanted to fight for my country and the cause of Islam. Even as a child I believed that the greatest sacrifice a man can make is to give his life for Allah and his country.

I was also taught as early as I can remember that Israel was our number one enemy and that the Jewish people

had to be annihilated. My life was lived in this atmosphere. And so you've got specific calls as you are growing up. As you go through school, college and university there is a thread that is tying your life together. For someone like me, who wanted to give his life for Islam and his country – all these things, when you put them together – brought me to the conclusion that I had to join the army and be a career officer and a loyal Muslim.

Why were you so concerned to give your life for your country and for Islam?

You have to understand what it's like to be a Muslim. You can never experience any true peace. You can never be sure that your good deeds will outweigh the bad ones that you have done in your life. The only way that you can be absolutely sure about going to heaven is to die on the battlefield as a warrior for Allah. And so that was one of my regular prayers – as an officer, as a soldier – that Allah might grant me the mercy to die on the battlefield for the cause of Islam. I used to pray this every day because I believed that if I died as a martyr, in the cause of my religion, then I would go straight to heaven. This was the way to escape judgment. In my case, I knew that if my deeds were weighed on the balance I would most likely go to hell. So to die in battle and avoid the judgment was a great relief.

Is this the main reason young Muslim men are happy to die in the cause of Islam?

I believe it is. That was what we were taught. It was explained to me that, according to the Qur'an, there was only one sure way to go to heaven – and that was by suffering death in jihad (holy war). The Qur'an teaches that if a man dies fighting for Allah he is guaranteed the forgiveness of all sins and is assured of a reserved place in paradise (3:157;169).

Further, he is promised a crown of glory and the sexual pleasures of 72 virgins. He is also absolved from the suffering of the grave and the horrors of judgment. And then there's the added bonus that if you die striving in the cause of Allah, you can bring 70 of your relatives with you into paradise. I believe this is why so many young Muslims, especially Palestinians, are willing to die as martyrs in the war against Jews and other infidels. You have everything to gain by dying on the battlefield. There's really nothing to lose.

It's hard for people in the West to understand this because here we have a completely different outlook on life. But in a genuine Muslim setting all of life is dominated by religion. There is no division between sacred and secular. You don't have a separation between church and state because the interests of Islam and the national interest merge. It is the duty of an Islamic state to further the interests of religion. So it is impossible for the individual to escape from Islam. People in the West find this difficult to grasp because we experience such tremendous freedoms here. And it is this freedom that so many Muslims resent, particularly here in Australia.

I will never forget a meeting where I was speaking in Australia. A young Muslim man – about 18 years old – came up to me at the end of my talk. He was very passionate. We had an exchange and he finished by saying: "You know the biggest enemy in this country is freedom." This is the normal way to think in an Islamic society. Muslims believe that we are meant to be guided, moulded, shaped by our religious teachers. There is no personal freedom. They believe that the soul is seasoned and grows as it submits unquestioningly to the teaching of the Qur'an.

So did you progress into the army?

Yes, I joined the army. It took me five years to prepare for all the interviews because the tests and competition for a commission were very tough: 20,000 people applied and only 19 were accepted. But the prospects for career advancement were exceptional and so I was glad to get in. My great ambition was to be a general by my mid-40s. So I put everything, every effort, every energy, every thought, everything toward that goal.

And what happened then?

Well, my career came to a grinding halt because of a civil war. And my life became even more complicated because I became a Christian. All these changes took place during a number of years, and I need to explain what happened in my life so that you can see how the Lord amazingly brought me to himself.

Muslims believe that we are meant to be guided, moulded, shaped by our religious teachers. There is no personal freedom.

Tell us.

While I was planning to join the army, I realised that I would have to learn English because all the interviews were conducted in it. But I had a problem – no one could teach me to speak it.

But one day I heard some people singing in English in a church, so I knocked on the door and went inside. It was a Gospel Hall run by the Australian Baptist Missionary Society and the preacher was speaking in English. So I figured out that it was a good place to come every Sunday to hear English. And I told my parents about it. They were very happy that I'd found a place like that because they wanted me to join the army. And so my parents made sure that no one prevented me from going to church. It's funny that later my father disowned me because I became a Christian. Yet, even he, in the early days, made sure that I was free to go there.

So when I went there and I began to meet the missionaries. And I discovered that they were really fine people. And that started me asking questions: Why are these people so different to the impression that I have been given of people from the West?

So what ultimately led you to Christ?

The preaching of Jesus Christ. Though outwardly I was learning English, inwardly my spirit was learning about Christ. So there was a testimony born in my own spirit, if I can put it this way. And then we had a preacher come from Egypt, his name was Mr Girghis, and I was invited to come and listen to him one evening. And his subject was: "How big are you in the sight of God?"

And that challenged me because I was trying to join the army to be a commissioned officer, and in those days in my country if you were an army officer you were like a little king; everything was given to you, you were the elite of society. People gave you gifts and did whatever they could to please you. Free tickets, free meals, reserved seats – all that sort of thing. But Mr Girghis challenged me about whether it was right to be so proud and exercise such power and authority.

And on that night I had a dream. And in that dream I found that I was in the army and I was authorised to go and bring in someone dead or alive. And so I went to this person's place and I said to him: "Come with me or I'll take your body with me." And he refused to come. This is my dream! And I was about to kill him. Then the window in that room

opened up and a burst of light came through that window. I fell to the floor – this was in my dream – and I was almost blinded.

And then I heard a voice say: “Stand up.” And I stood up. And the voice said: “Open your eyes.” And I opened my eyes and I could see through the window something like a star but it was more than a star – I can’t describe it, but it was a light. And then the same voice said: “Who are you to destroy my creation?” At that point I woke up. And I began to think about how true it was. You know, if you haven’t made something then you have no right to destroy it. And that stirred me up quite a lot.

Then we had our civil war. So I had to take a side in that, and I joined the rebels. It’s a very long story. As I look back, I can see how God saved my life on many occasions through the help of Christian people and by the Lord directing my circumstances. It was ultimately through all these things that I met my wife too.

To convert to Christianity in Islamic culture is a profound religious act with life-and-death consequences. Why did you feel you could no longer continue as a Muslim and you had to be a follower of Jesus?

There are a number of things. As a Muslim you are told from your childhood that you cannot question the unquestionable. And the Qur’an is unquestionable. And my problem was that I was questioning a number of things.

For instance, I had questions about the status of women. I could not accept their status or the way they were treated in Islam. In my country they were looked at as though they were less than human. I found that very difficult to accept. But I was not able to question this teaching because if I asked the mullah, he would say: “Ssh. Hush. You are not to ask that kind of question.” The problem is that if the Qur’an says: “The sun rises in the west”, and you know for a fact that it doesn’t, you’ve still got to accept that the sun rises in the west.

The other problem was that there were all sorts of contradictions in the Qur’an. Some things that Muhammad said at the beginning are contradicted later on. But my problem was this: if the Qur’an is the word of God, then how can there be later revelations that actually contradict the earlier ones? It should be the one, consistent message all the way through.

I was also troubled by the blatant homosexuality of many of the priests.

Many of these men knew the Qur’an back-to-front yet they lived hypocritical lives. So those things really hit me hard and made me ask: “What is the alternative?”

Do many Muslims share your spiritual longings?

Yes, particularly Muslims who have had the opportunity to get a good education and have been to university. They have all sorts of questions and spiritual struggles. The problem is that very few Muslims have read the Qur’an. They may have read bits here and there, but mostly they have heard what the priests, the mullahs, have said. About 80 per cent of Muslims have not read the Qur’an right through with understanding. Many mullahs have never read right through either.

About 80 per cent of Muslims have not read the Qur’an right through with understanding.



Do you think that many Muslims share your views on Islam?

Educated Muslims undoubtedly share some of the misgivings that I have had about Islam. The problem is that once they enter the Muslim community they are not able to have a questioning attitude. One of the problems is that when push comes to shove, moderates usually become fanatics.

You can see this tendency quite clearly in the response of many Muslims to the gang rapes that were committed in Sydney over the past few years. While some community leaders have condemned them, the overall effect has been to unite Muslims. I would love to be a fly on the walls of some of their meetings to hear exactly what they are discussing. But if their thinking is similar to the way mine used to be when I was a Muslim, then I know one thing: they will never really feel at home in Australia.

How do Muslims cope with being so different to the rest of Australia?

I think they find it very hard. They feel that they are strangers here. And their religion leads them to them having a “them-us” mentality. I think that’s one of

the reasons why many Muslims feel that they need to have a part of Australia where they can exercise their faith without any interference from Western and non-Muslim influences.

I’m not a prophet, but I believe that there are a lot of Muslims in Australia who are hoping that some day a part of Australia will be declared an Islamic state – in say, 20, 30, or 50 years. And their numbers are increasing dramatically. We are told that the Australian families are producing 1.7 children on average; however, Muslim families are having an average five or six children. Many Muslims are coming here as immigrants.

When you look at all these facts in a social perspective, I don’t think it’s unreasonable to foresee a lot of instability several decades from now. It happened in Lebanon when a majority Maronite population was overtaken by the fast-growing Muslim Druze community. The government needs to be aware of this potential problem.

There seems to be a worldwide resurgence of Islam at the moment. What’s driving it? Is it the wealth of the Arab oil nations?

I don’t think it’s Arab wealth. It’s more a matter of the Islamic worldview. Islam is different to Christianity in that it expands by military conquest. The church is meant to grow through evangelism and conversion. But Islam has grown historically through armed conflict and territorial gain. In Islam, territory is directly related to religion.

Islam has not spread by sending missionaries; it spreads through military conquest. Look what’s going on in Indonesia and West Papua at the moment. Christian communities are being attacked and murdered by the Laskar Jihad. This is how Muslim influence is growing there – through conquest and fear.

As soon as lands are captured, the locals are given an option: “become a Muslim or perish.” There is a saying: “It is better for you to die under the sword of the Muslim than to die as an infidel.” Muslims also give a choice to the Jews and Christians: “You either become Muslims or you will be put in a class called ‘Dhimmi’, which means a second-class citizen.” In that case, you have to pay an extra tax for the privileges of living in a Muslim country.

Muslim scholars see jihad (holy war) as a basic Muslim duty. They are required to wage war as a religious act against all who attack Muslim territory as well as against

infidels, apostates and People of the Book (Jews and Christians). They divide the world between what they call the *dar al-Islam* (land of Islam) and the *dar al-harb* (land of war). Muslims believe that they must struggle to expand the dar al-Islam throughout the world so that everyone will have the opportunity to live within a just Islamic political and social order. In other words, they want to increase the political territory under their control. People need to know this.

But if Muslims are religiously at odds with societies that are non-Islamic, why do they go to live in them?

Sometimes they may not have a choice. They may be forced into these countries by circumstances beyond their control. But if they act consistently with their beliefs they will have to struggle against the culture and religion of the society where they find themselves. And this doesn't mean that they have to move away. Look what's happening in Nigeria and Sudan. There, various parts of the country have been declared Muslim and they come under the Shariah law as the Muslim proportion of the population grows or gains political power.

The Islamic worldview will ultimately present Western nations with a huge political problem. Muslims don't send missionaries like the Christian church. They just send floods of people. And once their numbers grow, then they begin to exert political pressure. They have already asked the British parliament several years ago for the right to set up an Islamic parliament to govern the affairs of the Muslim community there. They were turned down. It's possible that a similar request could be made in Australia in, say, 30 years time.

I have a friend who went along to a mosque in Sydney. The people in the mosque embraced and welcomed him. They even offered him a Turkish girl that he could marry and who would take care of him very well. They said to him, "Brother, you should join us. This land is ours. And it will be ours." And he said, "Well, we're only a small group now." And they said, "Oh, maybe today we are 300,000 but give us a few more years and we'll be 3 million." That's the sort of aspirations that many of them have.

Unfortunately, many Australians with whom I speak are completely naïve in understanding the religious and political ambitions of Islam. If they bothered to look on Islamic web-sites they would see what I mean (www.islam.org.au).

Why do Muslims have such a problem with Western culture?

Because they believe that Western culture is completely corrupt. For instance this comment about Australia came off an Islamic web-site: "It is therefore inevitable as long as we live here ... that we will, through a process of cultural osmosis, take on some of the characteristics of the *kafirs* (unbelievers). The comparison of Islam to the kafir is like that of fresh, clear spring water and water brought up from the bottom of suburban sewer. If even a drop of the filthy water enters the clear water, the clarity diminishes.

Likewise, it only takes a drop of the filth of disbelief to contaminate Islam in the West. If we have it within our means we should therefore consider moving to a Muslim land whereby we can at least live amongst our brethren and within an Islamic society free from the contamination of the unbelievers" (www.islam.org.au, Preserving the Islamic Identity in the West: Threats and Solutions).

I think this explains why Muslims have such a difficult time accommodating themselves to western culture. Their religion sets up a barrier.

Many Australians are completely naïve in understanding the religious and political ambitions of Islam.

Why is America the object of so much Islamic hatred? The Americans helped Muslims in Afghanistan and Bosnia, and give billions of dollars to Egypt.

The problem with the Americans is tied up with the Muslim hatred for Israel. If America did not back Israel it would be a totally different situation. However, because America backs Israel, Muslims refer to it as the "greater Satan," and Israel is known as the "little Satan".

Of course, the tension between Israel and Islam goes all the way back to the hostility that arose between Isaac and Ishmael in the time of Abraham. And Israel's strength is America. America has put its money, wealth, armour, technology into Israel. And Israel is a reflection of the West in the middle of an autocratic, dictatorial, Islamic world. And so in every way Israel is an offence. Israel's problem goes back into Abraham's days because, again in tradition, it says that the Jews were Allah's biggest enemy.

Why is Islam more militant than other religions? Is there something in its theology?

Yes, there is. One of the central concepts of Islam is jihad. Jihad literally means "to struggle". It is a Muslim's duty to struggle in the path of God and in the example of the prophet Mohammed and his early companions. While jihad has been interpreted in a number of different ways, in recent years growing numbers of Muslims have maintained that it's a universal religious obligation for all true

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Muslims to join the jihad to promote a global Islamic revolution. Some of the more vocal and radical groups combine militancy and messianic visions and call upon their followers to take up armed struggle to subject the world to Allah.

I was taught as a small boy that I must engage in jihad against Israel. I learned from my mullah and family to hate the Jewish people. I was told that the number one enemy of Allah is the Jews and they are to be annihilated; the state of Israel was to be destroyed. All Muslims are taught this.

Do all Muslims believe it?

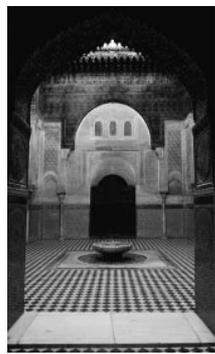
As far as I am aware. It's an essential belief of Islam because I've quoted to you from the Qur'an just now: "The stone will say: 'There is a Jew hiding behind me.' A tree will say: 'There is a Jew hiding behind me. Kill him!'"

Here the stone and the tree are talking to the Muslims! And this is just one quotation. There are many other quotations in the Qur'an (see www.islam.org.au, The Termination of Israel: A Qur'anic Fact). So when, and I will be honest with you, you read the Qur'an from the beginning to the end, it is not a book that propagates peace. It is a book that propagates war. Having been a devout Muslim myself, I

cannot understand the ignorance of people in the West who say that Islam is a religion of peace. How can they say that when it is used by the people to drive planes into towers and to kill people throughout the centuries? All I can say is that they have not studied the Qur'an and that they are ignorant of history.

Could attacking Iraq unite the Islamic world against the West and renew persecution against the Church?

Most certainly. The church is already persecuted, and it will be even more so. In Pakistan, as you know, numbers of



It's an historical fact that wherever Muslims conquered, gradually Christianity disappeared.

Christians have been deliberately murdered in cold-blood in recent months. In other places around the world many Christians are being martyred every day in places like Ambon and the Sudan. In Islamic countries you cannot practice Christianity openly. While the West gives Muslims the right to freely practise their faith, Muslim countries do not extend the same privileges to Christians or other religious minorities.

For instance, in Saudi Arabia it is impossible to meet publicly for Christian worship. If you did so, you could risk the death penalty. Christians are forced to meet underground.

Do you think that bin Laden is trying to trigger a massive confrontation with civilisations that ends in war?

That's right. I think he is trying to issue a world-wide call to Muslims to rise in jihad. The World Trade Centre attack was meant to be a trumpet call to Muslims to unite and to conquer the West. He wants to give Islam new strength and focus. Bin Laden's activity will probably be the catalyst for a new wave of militancy. His aim is to eradicate Jews and Christians.

It's an historical fact that wherever Muslims conquered, gradually Christianity disappeared. For instance, in the Byzantine Empire the church played

a major role; well, that came to an end with the Muslim invasions. Now that part of the world is completely dominated by the mosque. That's the story wherever Islam went. And now in the West I hear old church buildings are being purchased by Muslims who are turning them into mosques. And this is happening rapidly here as well as in other Western countries.

I heard just the other day that when the mosque at Regents Park opened in London, one of the speakers said: "If we can win London, we can win the whole Western world." I attach great significance to that statement. It shows an aspiration and a desire to control and dominate the West. They believe that since everyone will become a Muslim at the end of history, why not become Muslims now?

We are commanded to love all people and to share the Gospel with them. How do Christians go about witnessing and sharing the love of God with Muslims? Is it possible?

It's possible, but you have to remember that it can only be done in the power of God. You will come to nothing unless there is a supernatural breakthrough. Every conversion story that I've heard of Muslims has been different. And I've come to realise that every one of them has a supernatural intervention. You can read books like *I Dared To Call Him Father* and *The Torn Veil* and a number of other testimonies. Every one of them is different.

Christians must rely upon the power of God in reaching Muslims. Muslim outreach is 75 per cent praying and 25 per cent witnessing. The spiritual veil that covers their eyes can only be removed by God himself in his sovereign will and purpose, and that's where the problem lies. We must love and respect them but that will be ineffective unless we pray for them. We must ask God to give them open minds because one of the problems is this that the moment you talk about Christ as the Son of God, you commit the unforgivable sin.

And so we've got to love them, we've got to know as much as possible to start with, but never to enter into an argument because if you enter into an argument you will only create wars. If I sense there's an argument developing, I deliberately stop. I say: "Please, no more. I don't want to argue with you. Leave it for another day." Once you argue with anyone, that's it, nobody is going anywhere.

Peter Hastie is issues editor of AP.



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Introducing Islam

Muslims, too, have basic beliefs and a sacred text.

More Muslims than ever before are moving to or living in the West. But Christians should not see that as a threat, but an opportunity. Where once the task of reaching Muslims used to be seen as purely overseas mission involving danger, sacrifice and expense, today it can be simply neighbourhood evangelism.

However, most of the world's billion Muslim still live in the traditional Islamic nations. Even here, tourism, commerce and the need for technical specialists in developing Islamic nations has brought Christians into close contact with Muslims in their home countries.

There are five main geographical groups of Islamic people. First is the Arab countries, where most of the population is Muslim, they hold the place of honour in the world Islamic community. But there are large Christian minorities in Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Syria and Iraq. In Lebanon, half the people are Christians.

Second is the Islamic nations of Asia, including Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Then there is the growing community in sub-Saharan Africa. In some countries the majority are now Muslims (Senegal, Mali, Niger, Chad and Somalia), in others Islam is not yet dominant (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda).

The fourth group is the Muslim communities in Asia and Eastern Europe. There are large communities of Muslims living in non-Islamic countries such as India (50 million), China (26 million) and in the south of the former Soviet Union (26 million). There are also large groups in countries like Poland, Hungary, Albania and the former Yugoslavia. Finally, there are migrant groups in Western Europe, the USA and Australia. In the USA there is a large group of Afro-Americans who have adopted Islam as their religion, and call themselves Black Muslims.

Every Muslim must uphold the Five Pillars of Islam to please God and obtain rewards in Paradise. These are: 1) **Declaring the Faith (El-Shahadat).** Regardless of race or language a Muslim

Name withheld

must formally declare in Arabic "I declare that there is no God but Allah and Mohammed is the Apostle of Allah". This is the declaration that makes a man a Muslim and it must be made publicly at least once in a life time. It is a summary of Muslim belief and forms part of every call to prayer.

2) **The five prayers.** In Muslim countries, the faithful are called to prayer five times a day. In other places Muslims try their best to pray at fixed times at their place of work, or after work. On Friday at noon Muslims are required to gather at the mosque to pray.

3) **The compulsory payment (zakat).** This is not almsgiving or charity, but a compulsory payment of 2 per cent of one's income. On the other hand it is not a general tax as it has to be spent in specific ways in helping needy Muslims. Zakat means pure, and giving in this way is an act of faith and a means of purifying one's soul.

4) **The fasting month.** Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. All adults Muslims are required to abstain from all food, drink, and sexual intercourse during the daylight hours in this month. No adult Muslim (over 15 years of age) is exempt from the fast except those who are sick (including pregnant and nursing women) or on a journey of more than three days' duration. The exempt, however must fast for 30 days at some other time.

5) **Pilgrimage to Mecca.** Mohammed's birthplace, Mecca, is where the Kaa'ba is. Muslims believe that this shrine was built by Abraham as a place of worship but was corrupted by the Arabs with their idols. When Muhammad and his followers entered Mecca in 630AD they destroyed the idols and cleansed the Kaa'ba, making it the focus of Islam, the centre of true worship of God, prayer and the focus of annual pilgrimage. They believe that

every step taken by the pilgrim in the direction of the Kaa'ba wipes out more sins and the one who dies on the way is enrolled as an Islamic martyr. The Hajj, as the pilgrimage is called, is the hope of every Muslim and is required once in a lifetime.

To Muslims, the Qur'an is the final revelation of God's will to the world. They have five fundamental beliefs concerning the Quran. 1) It is the literal dictated word of God that he wrote in heaven on a "guarded tablet" before it was handed down to Mohammed. 2) The Qur'an is eternal, uncreated, unchanged and incorruptible. It completely surpasses the Bible, which is viewed as being hopelessly corrupted. 3) It is a miracle (a sign) from God, since Mohammed himself was not able to read or write. 4) The Qur'an is written in perfect Arabic since Allah wrote it himself and therefore there are no variant readings in it and no one can write any literature like that found in it. 5) The Qur'an cannot be translated into any other language.

However these are claims do not hold up. There is concrete evidence in Islamic tradition that from the start the Qur'an had numerous variant and conflicting readings, its Arabic is such that it contains many grammatical errors and that there are contradictions and mistakes in its teachings.

Many Muslims feel that any criticism of the Qur'an cannot be allowed. But if Muslims want the freedom to criticise the Bible and insist that it has been corrupted, then we must be allowed to criticise the Qur'an!

The English reader of Islamic books must be aware of the hidden agenda they often contain. The translators of the Qur'an and other religious works do not hesitate to mistranslate the Arabic text to keep the English reader from discovering obvious errors and contradictions.

The author of this article has received death threats and asks that his name be withheld.

No fear

The Christian response is to pursue righteousness.

In the year before the attack on the World Trade Centre, *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism* ominously predicted: "Deaths as a result of ... terrorism and insurgency appear to be on the increase ... perhaps the most significant change in patterns of insurgency and political violence in the last 20 years is the increase in the number of religiously motivated groups."

If this wasn't clear to the West before September 11 2001, it ought to be after the appalling massacre at the Sari Club, Kuta Beach, Bali, one year later, in which more than 200 people perished in an explosive fireball as they partied on a balmy mid-October night.

The Indonesian government was quick to see the terrorist trademarks in the bombing, especially the fingerprints of

Peter Hastie

Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda. Senior officials noted that the blast was calculated to turn the nightclub into a veritable killing-field of Australians, and was also designed to mark the first anniversary of the US-led incursion into Afghanistan. The blunt message: terrorist payback.

This tragic event for Australians serves as a warning that world-wide religious terrorism has now become our most serious political threat. Unfortunately, it is not a problem that will be resolved in a matter of weeks or months by sending special forces to terrorist havens to eradicate their training camps. The problem is far more deeply rooted than that.

As Sir William Rees-Mogg forecast in 1987 in *Blood in the Streets*, the world now faces an era of prolonged instability as terrorist groups capitalise on the power that modern weapons and technology have put into their hands. Small groups of fanatics can now wield a degree of power that not long ago exceeded their wildest dreams.

And they are succeeding in achieving their major psychological and political objectives, which are to shock and intimidate the international community.

Naturally, any meaningful response to these terrorists must begin with understanding their motives. Fortunately, we are not left to guess-work here. While recognising that all the great religions, Christianity included, have had terrorists in their ranks, it is important to note that Islam provides a theology that forms the seed-bed for armed struggle and revolution.

"Many people seem to think that bin Laden is just a violent cult leader," said Michael Doran, a professor of Near Eastern studies at Princeton University. "But the truth is that he is tapping into a minority Islamic tradition with a wide following and a deep history."

As John Esposito points out in his book, *Unholy War*, the doctrine of jihad – or holy war – has a long and richly-textured history within Islam. Its importance lies in the fact that the Qur'an commands Muslims to struggle (the literal meaning of the word jihad) in the path of Allah and in the example of the Prophet Mohammed. While the term itself contains multiple layers of meaning, in the contemporary scene its radical connotations have overshadowed all others. Islamic terrorists find as much inspiration for their devilish acts in a thousand years of Islamic theology as they have from the swashbuckling image of Osama bin Laden holding the Qur'an in one hand and a Kalashnikov in the other.

The undeniable fact is that there is a significant tradition within Islamic theology that is being used to promote a global revolution as the personal religious duty for all true Muslims. These terrorists believe that they have a high and holy cause – to spread Islam throughout the world as well as to destroy Israel and its American "patron". In their eyes, violence serves a noble end.

How should Christians respond to this terror? A number of important things need to be said. First, as Jesus reminds us in speaking of similarly tragic events in the first century (Luke 13:1-5), the search for a link between the catastrophe and the moral state of the victims is a fruitless and spiritually misguided exercise. "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered in this way? I tell you, no", said Jesus.

So, when Jerry Falwell says such terrorist strikes on individuals are God's judgment for the nation's sins of decadence and secularism, he is venturing into dangerous territory. Likewise, when many people self-righteously suggest that Australia somehow deserves to suffer because of its support for US anti-terrorist initiatives in Afghanistan, they, too, are committing a similar error. According to Jesus, these terrifying disasters are ideal opportunities for each of us to get right with God. On our day of national mourning, we should have been thinking primarily of the need to confess and repent of our personal sins. This is the Christian

Pray for Muslims

1. The eyes and hearts of Muslims be opened to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Built into Islam are specific denials of truths fundamental to us who believe in him. The barriers to faith are so numerous that it requires a deep working of the Holy Spirit.

2. Muslim background believers in Christ who are relatively few.

Only in a few areas such as parts of Indonesia, Central Asia, Nigeria and Algeria have there been significant turnings to Christ. Many Muslim lands have adopted shariah laws which require the death penalty for apostates from Islam.

3. Christian ministries to Muslims.

These have long been limited, but are on the increase. Yet only about 6 per cent of all foreign missionaries are working for the blessing of Muslims who constitute nearly a third of all non-Christians. Pray for more to be called, equipped and led into fruitful ministry to Muslims.

Operation World 

way to mark such occasions.

Second, we need to encourage our national leaders to fulfil their God-given mandate. As Paul reminds us, the state “does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer” (Rom. 13:4).

Many Christians have become confused on this point, and believe that the West has no moral justification for tracking down terrorists and their state sponsors and bringing them to justice. They believe that the present state of affairs has arisen through Western economic imperialism and moral decadence. In their eyes, the terrorists are the victims.

While I am no apologist for the immorality, greed and self-interest that often marks the foreign and economic policies of liberal democracies, I am often amazed at the faulty moral vision of many Western intellectuals. For all their insight, they cannot see the yawning moral gulf between a modern liberal democracy – with all its inherent faults in a fallen world – and a terrorist outfit that plans in cold-blood to indiscriminately blow up hundreds or thousands of victims. Such moral blindness is breath-taking.

The problem, of course, as Reinhold Niebuhr had to remind many of his fellow liberals in the face of Nazi aggression in the 1940s, is that we can only obtain moral

clarity by believing in the existence of evil. It is interesting how that word, once taboo, has crept back into the current political vocabulary. Diplomacy is helpful up to a point. But it has no answers for incorrigible evil – when wild-eyed militia men wielding machetes attack defenceless citizens in East Timor or when Saddam’s Republican Guard rumble into Kuwait City and string up non-combatants from lamp-posts. There comes a time when the will of tyrants can only be tamed by more potent means.

There is no dodging the fact that bringing terrorists to justice may involve us in uneasy alliances and massive military strikes. But what other responsible choice do our leaders have? When terrorist groups and rogue nations have indicated their willingness to use weapons of mass destruction and have, as President Bush says, “no inner voice of reason or hint of conscience”, they must be brought to heel. The state has a duty to protect the lives of its citizens.

Finally, Christians have a responsibility

to face terrorism by “overcoming evil with good” (Rom. 12:21). It is not surprising that many of the terrorists are affronted by the sexual liberties, naked greed, and partisanship of the West. Although we may be outraged by the way they have delivered their disapproval, it should give us pause to consider our ways and to press more vigorously for moral righteousness, both on a personal level and in public life.

We also need to press our leaders to remind Israel to act justly towards Palestinians and to remove Jewish squatters from Palestinian territories. And, in the wake of the Bali massacre, we must not only come to the aid of Australian victims, but we should urge our government and churches to provide humanitarian assistance to the Balinese and to maintain foreign aid to needy Muslim nations. This overcomes evil with good and breaks the cycle of hate.

Religious terrorism will not be met by revenge. It will only be met by Christians doing good – praying for those who hate them; sending missionaries to explain the gospel of reconciliation at great cost; giving generously through relief agencies; visiting Muslim countries on good-will missions and, as a last resort, going as soldiers, sailors and aircrew to contain wickedness as quickly and as mercifully as possible.

Peter Hastie is issues editor of AP.

AP

It is interesting how “evil”, once taboo, has crept back into the current political vocabulary.

A sensitive witness

For 35 years Bill Dunnett spent Sunday afternoons and evenings with a team of Christians in street evangelism, meeting many Muslims in this way. He and his wife used their home in hospitality and gradually learned how to approach Muslims with the gospel. In 1993, he wrote *Sharing the Good News with Muslims* (ANZEA). The principles below are drawn from the summary at the end of this simple but very helpful book.

1. Use the Word of God. Muslims respect the sacred books; the Law of Moses, Psalms, Gospels and the Qur’an. Let the Bible speak for itself.

2. Be constant in prayer. It is the Holy Spirit who wins men and women to Christ. Seek his guidance and power as you present the Word.

3. Be a genuine friend. Saying “hello” is not enough. If you really care, show it by

inviting Muslims into your home, sharing your time, and helping them with their problems.

4. Ask thought-provoking questions. Do you know peace with God? Do you have forgiveness of sin? Does God answer your prayers? Do you expect to go to heaven? Questions like these show that you have an interest in the important things of life that concern Muslims.

5. Listen attentively. When you ask a question, courtesy requires that you listen to the answer. Also, you can learn more of Muslims’ thought patterns so you can better relate to them.

6. Present your beliefs openly. State what you believe, clearly and without apology, showing Scripture portions that support those teachings. Thus you place the responsibility for doctrine where it belongs – on the Word of God.

7. Reason, do not argue. Arguing may win a point but lose a hearing; it generates

a lot of heat but little light. Arguing seldom achieves anything, and may close a mind against you and the gospel.

8. Never denigrate Mohammed or the Qur’an. This is as offensive to a Muslim as disrespect about Christ or the Bible would be to you.

9. Respect their culture and sensitivities. Do not offend by putting your Bible (a holy book) on the floor, or by making jokes about their sacred topics such as fasting or praying. Do not refuse hospitality and do not offer offensive food, e.g. pig meat or alcohol. Dress modestly and do not appear too free with the opposite sex.

10. Persevere with patience. Muslims have a lot of rethinking to do when they are confronted with the claims of Christ. Don’t drive them into a corner by pressing them to admit their error. Rest assured that the Word of God will do its work in God’s good time.

AP

The hole at our heart

Christians have neglected a vital element, warns J. I. Packer.

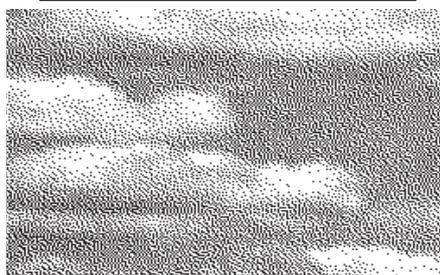
The corrective we modern Christians need comes from Scottish minister Robert Murray McCheyne, who a century and a half ago began a sentence thus: "My people's greatest need is..." Now, how would you expect a pastor to complete that sentence? By specifying a program or some particular skill he would bring, or a new way of looking at things, or what?

In fact, McCheyne ended it with the words "...my *personal holiness*". "Take time to be holy," said the old hymn, and it looks as if we all need to learn afresh to do that. For self-reliant busyness, so far from being a form or expression of holiness, is actually a negation of it and a distraction from it.

Nor is this the worst. As holiness is a neglected priority throughout the modern church generally, so it is specifically a fading glory in today's evangelical world.

Historically, holiness has been a leading mark of evangelical people, just as it has been a central emphasis among their teachers. Think of Luther's stress on faith producing good works and of Calvin's insistence on the third use of the law as code and spur for God's children. Think of the Puritans demanding a changed life as evidence of regeneration and hammering away at the need for everything in personal and community life to be holiness to the Lord. Think of the Dutch and German Pietists stressing the need for a pure heart expressed in a pure life, and of John Wesley proclaiming that "scriptural holiness" was Methodism's main message.

IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD



Think of the so-called holiness revival of the second half of the 19th century, and of the classic volume by J. C. Ryle, *Holiness* (still in print and selling well after 100 years), and of the thrust of the thought of such latter-day teachers as Oswald Chambers, Andrew Murray, A. W. Tozer, Watchman Nee, and John White. In the past, the uncompromising evangelical quest for holiness was awesome in its intensity. Yet that which was formerly a priority and a passion has become a secondary matter for us who bear the evangelical name today. Why?

Because evangelicals today are evidently insensitive to the holiness of God himself. Though we routinely affirm the reality of divine wrath against our sins, save as Christ's shed blood covers them, we do not think much about God's revealed hatred of sin in his own adopted family, nor do we "tremble at his word" as our forebears did, fearful lest they offend him (see Isaiah 66:2; Ezra 10:3), nor do we display that abhorrence of ungodly things that Jude had in mind when he spoke of "hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (v 23).

It is our habit to think of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as pally rather than pure, and to dismiss as sub-Christian any idea that God's first concern in his dealings with us might be to train us in righteousness as a step toward future joy, rather than to load us with present pleasures.

We are not in tune with the biblical perception of sin as pollution – dirt, to use a four-letter word – and when we find Scripture telling us that there are ways of behaving that God positively hates (see, for example, Psalms 5:4-6; 7:11-13; Proverbs 6:16; Isaiah 1:14; 61:8; Amos 5:21; Luke 16:15) we treat it as imaginative exaggeration. No wonder, then, that the quest for holiness among us has so largely petered out!

In this century, Roman Catholics, high Anglicans, and medievalists of all persuasions have produced many profound and perceptive treatments of the spiritual life-faith; prayer; peace; love; self-knowledge; self-denial; self-discipline; cross bearing; inward detachment with intercessory involvement; and so forth – which, whether or not fully sound in their understanding of the gospel, have qualities of spiritual sensitiveness and moral integrity that modern evangelical writing on holiness has not begun to match. That grieves me, and if what I write has the effect of alerting other evangelicals to what needs to be done here, I shall rejoice.

This relative eclipse of holiness as a main evangelical concern is little short of tragic, and I hope it will not long continue, particularly in a day of such striking evangelical advance in numbers, in institutional resources, in mission strategy, in academic achievement, in public standing, and in many other respects. We need to be very clear in our minds that none of these advances are going to count for much in the long run unless renewal in holiness accompanies them.

This extract is taken from Keep in Step with the Spirit by J.I. Packer (IVP, 1984). ap

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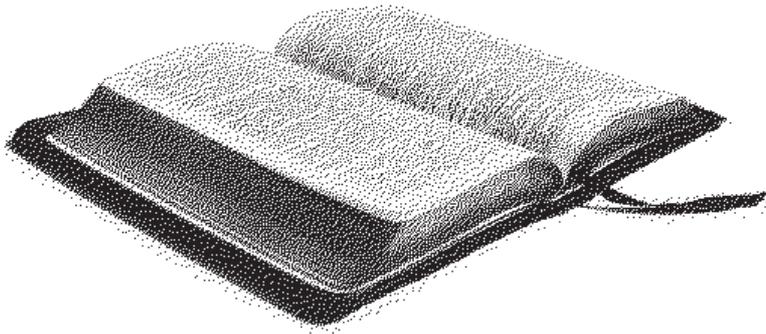


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Word for the wise



20 daily bible studies in Acts

The task that faces the Church today is a formidable one. We have been commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ to make disciples for him, but the message we have, the everlasting gospel, is not one our society wants to hear. It is Good News – but only to those who are willing to believe the bad news first: that we are all sinners under the sentence of death and there is only one way of escape, through faith in God’s son, Jesus.

The Bible studies this month will challenge us with how the early church faced its task, which was no different from ours. Because they knew where their power came from, and that the content of their message was not negotiable, they confronted their needy world with the gospel God had given them, based on the historical facts of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and on the fact of God’s eternal judgment on all who refuse to repent and believe in Jesus. They were not put off by opposition, or even by threats on their lives. We have much to learn from them as we seek to fulfil our mission at a time when other religions are making major inroads into our land and culture.

Bruce Christian

DAY 1 *Armed with powerful truth*

THE PASSAGE ACTS 1:1-11

THE POINT Luke wanted Theophilus to be thoroughly convinced about the historical fact of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and ascension to heaven; and of his gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church to empower her to bear witness to these truths until Jesus returns.

THE PARTICULARS

- Acts continues the Jesus story where Luke’s Gospel left off.
- In the 40 days between his resurrection and his ascension Jesus left his disciples in no doubt about the reality of his life, death, and resurrection, or about their meaning for God’s Kingdom.
- Jesus told his apostles they would be empowered to be his witnesses near and far, but that they were to wait in Jerusalem for the (soon) baptism of the Holy Spirit before they did anything.
- The job of witnessing belonged to the apostles; the results, timing and fulfilment of their task belonged to the Father alone.
- The apostles’ idea of Kingdom still centred on national Israel.
- Jesus will return in the clouds just as he went in the clouds.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What is our task today – to wait? to watch? or to witness? Are you fully convinced of all the historical facts of the Gospel?

DAY 2 *Prayer and Scripture*

THE PASSAGE ACTS 1:12-26

THE POINT In obedience to Christ the apostles waited. But it was not idle waiting: it was spent in constant prayer together and in seeking to know God’s will through the study of the Scriptures.

THE PARTICULARS

- The apostles waited together in Jerusalem in constant prayer.
- There were already about 120 believers for whom the apostles accepted leadership responsibility as the new people of God.
- The apostles recognised Scripture as their authority and source of wisdom for future guidance without Jesus’ bodily presence.
- The apostles recognised how Scripture had predicted Judas’ betrayal of Jesus (Psalm 69:25) and the need for his replacement among them (Psalm 109:8). The choice of Matthias was a merging of common sense (21-23) and divine intervention (24-26).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What priority do you give to spending time with God each day? Do you make use of group prayer and Bible study opportunities?
- Have you found a good balance between exercising common sense (not waiting for God to do what he has already equipped you to do) and prayerful trust (not rushing in ahead of him)?

DAY 3 *Power from on high*

THE PASSAGE **ACTS 2:1-13**

THE POINT On the Jewish Day of Pentecost (50 days after Passover and so 10 days after Jesus' ascension) Jesus' promise of baptism with the Holy Spirit was spectacularly fulfilled. The outward effects of this baptism were clearly supernatural, and far-reaching in terms of giving impetus to the early Church's task and mission.

THE PARTICULARS

- The baptism of the Holy Spirit was the spontaneous gift of God and was not induced by human effort or manipulation.
- The actual physical manifestation of this spiritual event was hard to describe but it involved loud, wind-like noise and what appeared to be a 'tongue' of fire 'sitting' on each apostle.
- God's timing was just right: the first missionary enterprise consisted of God bringing a fertile mission field to the Church! The gift of 'tongues' was the supernatural ability to communicate across language barriers without human assistance. God thus reversed both effects of the curse of Babel (Genesis 11:5-9).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- In the light of Pentecost, what are you praying for the Church today? What temptations or pitfalls might we face today if we try to turn accounts of historical fact into a recipe for practice?

DAY 4 *Listen carefully*

THE PASSAGE **ACTS 2:14-21**

THE POINT What happened at Pentecost was exactly what God said would happen through the prophet Joel some 700 years earlier. Any attempt to explain away the 'tongues' phenomenon as intoxication on the part of the apostles was therefore inappropriate – apart from the fact that it was only the early part of the day. God's clear actions in history in fulfilment of the clear predictions he has made in his Word must not just be 'written off' – they demand our careful attention.

THE PARTICULARS

- Peter, in the power of the Holy Spirit, proclaimed publicly and loudly to the people in the marketplace what God was doing.
- We need to 'listen carefully' when God acts in history.
- There was a note of urgency to respond positively and quickly at Pentecost. There will be a note of urgency when Jesus returns.
- God always responds positively to all who call on Jesus' name.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do you think we should be more forthright today in the public proclamation of God's truth? What opportunities still exist for us for marketplace evangelism? Why don't we use them?

DAY 5 *These are the facts*

THE PASSAGE **ACTS 2:22-31**

THE POINT Peter stood within easy walking distance of where Jesus was crucified and buried only 7 weeks earlier. The crowd he was talking to were familiar with these events. It would be a simple thing for them to check on the fact of the empty tomb. And all this was predicted in their Scriptures. David seemed to be speaking of himself in Psalm 16:8-11 but it was also easily verifiable that his dead body remained buried nearby. He was therefore clearly speaking of his descendant Messiah, Jesus.

THE PARTICULARS

- The fact of the existence of Jesus of Nazareth, and of his God-approved miracles and signs and wonders was well-known to Peter's hearers; all these things were undeniably true.
- Jesus' death on the cross, while part of God's pre-determined plan and purpose, was still a wicked, unconscionable act.
- God raised Jesus from the dead in fulfilment of Psalm 16:8-11.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Why do people still question the historical facts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection? Is it really surprising when many of Peter's hearers, who were eye-witnesses, refused to believe? Will God excuse unbelievers because there is lack of evidence?

DAY 6 *Jesus = Jehovah + Messiah. QED*

THE PASSAGE **ACTS 2:32-36**

THE POINT Peter ends his speech with the undeniable conclusion that the crucified Jesus now rules at God's right hand as Israel's promised, conquering Messiah who will one day bring everything into subjection to himself, as had been predicted in Psalm 110.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus' resurrection was God's proof of his true identity and the apostles stood as living eye-witnesses of the fact.
- The clear consequence of this is that Jesus now rules in heaven.
- The word Peter used for 'Lord' in verse 36 is the word the Jews used to translate God's name 'Jehovah/Yahweh/LORD' when the OT was translated into Greek in 160 BC. He was leaving no room for doubt among his Jewish hearers that they had just crucified their God, their promised Messiah (Christ)!

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How do you think you would have felt if you had been one of the God-fearing Jews in the Jerusalem crowd at Pentecost when Peter came to this point in his speech? Had you known the historical facts about Jesus very long before the proverbial penny actually dropped and you turned to him in repentance and faith? Have you actually taken this step? If not, why not do it now?

DAY 7 *Only bad people go to heaven*

THE PASSAGE **ACTS 2:37-41**

THE POINT About 3,000 of those present accepted the undeniable evidence about what they had just done to their Messiah. Hard as it was to admit their sin, they repented and cried out for help. By doing this they discovered the Good News that forgiveness was freely available and they received baptism and the Holy Spirit. How sad it is that all who refused to admit their guilt in the face of the evidence never found this out and remained God's enemies!

THE PARTICULARS

- Many in the crowd drew the right conclusion from the facts Peter had put before them and responded appropriately.
- The gifts of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit were given on the basis of their repentance and faith. Baptism was the outward sign of the reality of this inner working of the Holy Spirit.
- God 'calls' his elect: the initiative lies with him. It is on this basis that believing parents can take hold of the covenant promises on behalf of their children (39). (Presumably, if circumcised Jewish children had been excluded from the Pentecost baptismal ceremony Peter would have had to explain why!)

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How can we 'save ourselves from this corrupt generation'?

DAY 8 *A good pattern for the Church*

THE PASSAGE **ACTS 2:42-47**

THE POINT Luke gives us a sketch of life in the early Church following Pentecost. It was characterised by commitment to 4 things: the study of God's word, sharing together, the Lord's Supper, and prayer. This was the spontaneous result of their new-found faith, and their sharing together even went as far as communal living. The outcome of all this was the incidence of apostolic signs and wonders, general goodwill in society, and daily growth in numbers.

THE PARTICULARS

- The early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. This was Holy Spirit inspired, based on the OT Scriptures and the teaching of Jesus, eventually being set down in the NT.
- They shared everything together so that no-one was in need.
- They shared the Lord's Supper together and prayed together.
- God's blessing was reflected in community goodwill and growth.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- We can't reproduce the particular circumstances of the early Church, especially the obvious impact of the proximity of the Easter events, but what can we learn from this account that will help us make our Church life more vital and God-honouring?

DAY 9 *Jesus taught Peter well*

THE PASSAGE **ACTS 3:1-16**

THE POINT When Jesus fed the 5000, great crowds followed him. When he challenged them about who he was and why he came they left (see John 6). Peter's and John's healing of the cripple had a similar effect, and that crowd too had to face the challenge about Jesus.

THE PARTICULARS

- The apostles continued to go to the Jewish Temple to pray.
- The man crippled from birth was seeking alms but in the name and power of Jesus Peter and John were able to give him legs instead.
- The beggar and the people were greatly impressed by the miracle.
- Peter saw the danger (as he'd noticed Jesus had done in John 6) of people only being attracted by the signs and wonders. So he took the opportunity immediately to confront them with the truths of the Gospel and of who Jesus really was – their Messiah! 'You killed the author of life but God raised him from the dead.'
- Peter took no credit for the power to heal the man or even the 'goodness' to be God's instrument; all the credit was to Jesus.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do we run the risk today of trying to attract people to Christ but avoiding the offence of the cross? Why is this a problem?

DAY 10 *Never too late to repent*

THE PASSAGE **ACTS 3:17-26**

THE POINT Orthodox Jews today believe that if they all keep all God's Commandments for one day Messiah will come. Peter tells them something quite different: it is their failure to acknowledge the crucified Messiah that is excluding them from the blessing and from being the source of blessing to all the nations as God had promised to Abraham. However, it is never too late to repent!

THE PARTICULARS

- The act of crucifying Messiah Jesus was done in ignorance.
- The suffering and death of Jesus at the hand of the Jews was just as God had foretold through Moses and the prophets in the OT.
- The only way forward to refreshing and blessing was through repentance from sin toward God and receiving his forgiveness.
- The (now Second) Coming of Messiah Jesus is awaiting this.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- In the light of what Peter says in this sermon, what is the only solution to the seemingly unresolvable conflict in the land occupied by Israel today? Pray that Christians there will present clearly the true Gospel centred on the Cross, and that many Jews and Arabs alike will repent and turn to Jesus as the only Saviour.

DAY 11 *No other Name!*

THE PASSAGE **ACTS 4:1-12**

THE POINT The fast growth of this new Jesus' sect, with its claim that God had raised him from the dead, together with the fact of obvious miracles being performed in his name, was becoming a major problem for the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. By seizing and questioning Peter and John they gave the apostles another opportunity to declare Jesus as God's Messiah and mankind's only Saviour.

THE PARTICULARS

- The apostles' emphasis on the resurrection was particularly disturbing to the Jewish leaders (because it could be verified?).
- The Jewish opposition was matched by continued growth in the number of believers – now 5,000 men (+ women and children).
- Annas' involvement showed how concerned the Jews were.
- Like Jesus, Peter's only 'crime' was helping needy people!
- Peter again made it clear (this time from Psalm 118:22) that the man Jesus, who had just been crucified by the leaders standing before him, was God's promised Messiah, who had been raised to life again and was the only source of salvation for all people.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What must v.12 imply for Jews, Moslems, Buddhists, etc today?

DAY 12 *None so blind...!*

THE PASSAGE **ACTS 4:13-22**

THE POINT As in John 9, the Jewish leaders are again faced with a miracle, with eye witnesses convinced by the evidence pointing to Jesus as Messiah, and with no alternative explanation! So they adopt the same ploy now as then: closing their eyes and ears! There is none so blind as he who doesn't want to see. But the apostles were convinced men on God's mission, and could not be silenced.

THE PARTICULARS

- The Jewish leaders were as much amazed by the apostles' lack of the right background as by the miracle itself. They recognised them as having been Jesus' disciples, which only made it worse!
- Somehow they thought that demanding silence of Peter and John would change the reality – like a child covering his eyes so as not to be seen, or an ostrich burying its head in the sand!
- Peter and John made it quite clear that they were men under God's authority to proclaim the Good News about Jesus. They were not peddling a religious idea; they were reporting eternal truths based on historical facts. No threat could stop them speaking.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How real is your faith to you? How would you react if it became illegal here to try to convince others to follow Jesus?

DAY 13 *...the peoples plot in vain?*

THE PASSAGE **ACTS 4:23-31**

THE POINT Rather than silencing them, the threats of the Jews further encouraged Peter and John and those with them to see God's sovereign hand at work. What was happening was exactly as God had planned and foretold in Psalm 2, so they used this as a framework for prayer for greater boldness to speak with the accompanying signs and wonders. God answered their prayer powerfully.

THE PARTICULARS

- Peter and John reported back to the Church; it was a team effort.
- Fervent prayer was an essential part of the Church's mission.
- Psalm 2 makes quite clear that Jesus is the only Lord and Saviour. Eventually every knee must bow to him as God's only anointed Son. The world's active opposition to Jesus' rule does not take God by surprise. The Church must proclaim the absolute Lordship of Christ without compromise in spite of opposition.
- God answers specific believing prayer consistent with his will.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are we really convinced about the absolute uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour? Are we too accommodating of other religions like Islam, Buddhism, Judaism? What should we do?

DAY 14 *God's Word is not chained*

THE PASSAGE **ACTS 5:17-28**

THE POINT The Jewish leaders tried to prevent the spread of the Gospel by putting the apostles in the public prison. They were released by the Lord's supernatural intervention and were instructed to go on preaching right in the heart of enemy territory. In spite of this clear proof of God's approval of the apostles, and of their increasing popularity among the ordinary Jewish people, the Sanhedrin added to their guilt of Jesus' blood by more threats.

THE PARTICULARS

- The apostles' ongoing success made the Jewish leaders jealous.
- God's work cannot be impeded by prison bars (see 2 Tim. 2:9).
- God told the apostles to witness in the heart of the enemy camp.
- The Jewish leaders again refused to acknowledge the obvious.
- The Jewish leaders had previously recognised their condemnation in Jesus' teaching; they were now seeing it in the apostles'.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are we too easily frightened off by opposition, not wanting to offend those who oppose us?
- Do we ever let jealousy cloud our judgement concerning Gospel work that is enjoying God's blessing? What tests might apply?

DAY 15 *But if it is from God...*

THE PASSAGE **ACTS 5:29-42**

THE POINT The persistent boldness of the apostles in preaching the Gospel, together with their outspoken accusation concerning the recent crucifixion of Jesus, angered the Sanhedrin to the point where their own very lives were in danger. This did not worry them because they saw suffering for Christ as a badge of discipleship. Gamaliel's logic, which gave them a stay of execution, also provided further proof that they were obeying God – their purpose and activity has not failed for 2,000 years so far!

THE PARTICULARS

- The apostles were committed to obeying God despite the cost.
- Jesus rules as Prince and Saviour, the source of forgiveness of sin.
- The apostles' obedience to all they had seen and heard guaranteed the Holy Spirit's affirmation of what they were saying.
- Gamaliel's wise suggestion had the opposite effect to what he expected. (Was he, or another Sanhedrin member, converted as a result and that is how his advice became known to Luke?)
- The apostles rejoiced to be privileged to suffer for Jesus' sake.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do we always rejoice, and trust God to protect his Church?

DAY 16 *...like him in his death...*

THE PASSAGE **ACTS 7:30-39, 51-60**

THE POINT [We have moved on to Stephen and pick up his speech in the middle. It would be good if you have time to read all of Acts 7.] The main point that Stephen makes throughout his speech is that in spite of God's repeated miraculous provision for his people since the time of Abraham they persistently rejected his spokesmen. Stephen then accuses the Sanhedrin and high priest of disobedience, resisting the Holy Spirit and doing exactly the same thing with the ultimate spokesman, the promised Righteous One, Jesus! As a result the Jews did to Stephen what they had done to Jesus, and Stephen reflected Jesus' attitude in his death.

THE PARTICULARS

- The whole history of the Jews showed unrelenting opposition to, and harsh treatment of, God's prophets. They did the same to the promised Messiah, Jesus, and now to godly Stephen also.
- Stephen accused the Jewish leaders of being stubborn like their fathers, and even of being spiritually non-Jews (uncircumcised).
- Stephen was a true reflection of his Master in his death.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What was it that enabled Stephen to speak with such courage, to face death rejoicing, and to seek forgiveness for his murderers?

DAY 17 *Good News travels fast*

THE PASSAGE **ACTS 8:26-40**

THE POINT Philip is the second of the appointed deacons listed in Acts 6:5. (The first was Stephen whom we met yesterday.) The sovereign Lord orchestrated the whole interaction between him and the influential Ethiopian. Philip was able to explain the Good News about Jesus from the OT Scriptures and the official believed and was baptised: he thus became the first missionary to Ethiopia!

THE PARTICULARS

- Philip's obedience to the Holy Spirit's leading led to a Gospel opportunity with far-reaching consequences.
- The Lord prepared the eunuch's heart before he met Philip.
- Isaiah 53 is an excellent and effective starting point for sharing the Gospel; apparently Philip used other OT Scriptures as well.
- Baptism was the appropriate sequel to the eunuch's response of faith: his conversion was clearly the work of the Holy Spirit.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Philip was obviously dealing with a very different situation from that of Stephen before the Sanhedrin. What are some of the contrasts in the way Philip presented the Gospel here?
- When did you last ask God to give you a witness opportunity?

DAY 18 *One God, one Gospel*

THE PASSAGE **ACTS 14:11-22**

THE POINT Paul and Barnabas were faced with a situation where they could easily have promoted themselves instead of Christ. But they focussed their hearers back onto the only true and living God, the Creator and sustainer of the Universe. They showed the futility of worshipping any other 'worthless' human ideas. The Good News they had preached (verses 6-7) and confirmed with a healing miracle (verses 8-10) could not be divorced from this God of nature whose common grace brought blessing to all men. Jewish opposition persisted, as did the apostles' resolve to preach!

THE PARTICULARS

- Crowds can often be more attracted to the messenger than to the message. Preachers need to resist this danger (as Paul did).
- Paul used natural theology to draw his hearers to the Gospel.
- Verse 16 implies that the time of forbearance is now past and the day of accountability has now come (see Acts 17:30 tomorrow).
- There's enough evidence in nature to prove God's gracious provision to all people (see Paul's comment in Romans 1:20).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How might you use 'nature' to explain the Gospel to a friend?

DAY 19 *Go... and make disciples!*

THE PASSAGE **ACTS 17:16-34**

THE POINT Paul was troubled about the lost state of the Athenians. He came to them in the marketplace where they were. He spoke in their terms, leading them from where they were spiritually to God's revelation in the Gospel. He challenged them strongly with the need to repent, emphasising that the fact of Jesus' death and resurrection has left all men accountable to Christ as Judge.

THE PARTICULARS

- Paul was very troubled by the spiritual blindness of Athens.
- Paul sought to win Jews and Gentiles to Christ by going to where they were and challenging them, not waiting for them to come.
- Paul used an element of their beliefs to gain attention and then made clear that there is only one God who controls all human history with the purpose of bringing people to faith in Christ.
- God will judge all men on the basis of our relationship to Jesus.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How do verses 26-27 help us to deal with the modern questioning of the legitimacy of colonisation? What right did Europeans have to take Australia from the indigenous people? Do Christians have a right to be anywhere if they are not evangelising?!

DAY 20 *Soldiers of Christ, arise!*

THE PASSAGE **ACTS 20:17-38**

THE POINT Paul made clear to the Ephesian elders that his life's mission was to challenge all men, Jew and Gentile, to repent and trust in Jesus (21). He used every possible means to do this, knowing the dangers. He taught them everything God had revealed to him and warned them against destructive forces that would arise even from within the Church itself. He saw that we can never rest from the spiritual warfare to which we have been called.

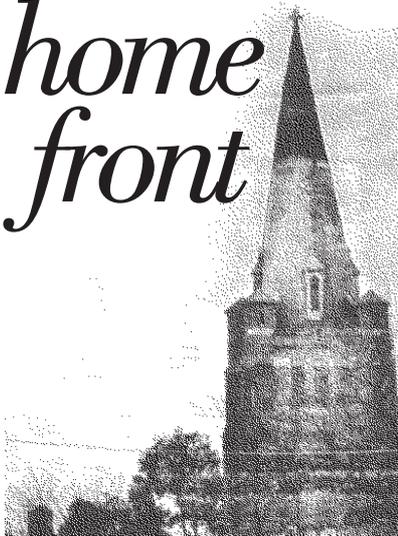
THE PARTICULARS

- Read again Paul's account of his apostolic passion. (vss 18-24)
- Read again Paul's concern for the Church's future. (vss 25-32)
- Read again Paul's blueprint for Christian ministry. (vss 33-38)

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Reflect on what we have seen in Acts about how the Early Church saw itself and its mission. What must we learn for today?
- What did it see was the source of its power?
 - What options did it think it had about whether to evangelise?
 - What options did it think it had about whom to evangelise?
 - What were the basic elements of its message?
 - Was it confrontational or apologetic in its approach?

home front



Resolutions concerning Fellowship

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria resolved on 9 October to encourage presbyteries and sessions, if they so wish, to take action against the organisation known as **The Fellowship**, whose beliefs and practices the 1998 assembly declared "inimical to the doctrine and practices of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria". The assembly passed three resolutions.

The first was to advise sessions and presbyteries to discipline individuals who refuse to repudiate and distance themselves from the distinctive beliefs and practices of **The Fellowship** with a view to removing them from all offices, and from all pastoral and teaching responsibilities. The second resolution advised Church courts not to appoint Fellowship people to offices or pastoral or teaching responsibilities, and the third resolution was to allocate human resources and/or money to provide resources to victims of belief and practices inimical to the doctrine and practices of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria.

The assembly granted three members leave to appeal against the resolutions to the next meeting of the General Assembly of Australia, in Sydney in September 2004.

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Assembly decisions

The PCV assembly also made various resolutions on social issues. It affirmed that "parental" rights should not be given to same sex parents over children involved in cases before the Children's Court or under protection orders, and endorsed the "Do No Harm" campaign of the **Australian Family Association**, which opposes human embryo research and cloning.

It instructed the **Home Mission Committee** to pursue the "quick build" concept of the church erecting its own buildings, to seek to establish evangelism teams to operate across parish and presbytery bounds and to bring to 2003 Assembly a plan for state wide apprenticeships.

Assembly also reappointed **Rev John Wilson**, the new moderator, as lecturer in practical theology at the theological college, and **Rev Dr Tony Bird** as lecturer in Biblical studies (New Testament). It decided to nominate **Rev Bob Thomas**, minister of St Kilda as the next Moderator-General of the PCA. It made a grant of \$75,000 to help establish the **Triple Seven Christian radio station**.

New moderator

The new moderator of the PCV, **Rev John Wilson**, was one of the first graduates of the PTC after church division, and a pastor of 17 years' experience. He and his wife Paula have three children. Mr Wilson is also deputy clerk of the General Assembly. He and his family worship with the Eltham congregation.

Venerable Norwood

The **St Giles, Norwood**, congregation in central Adelaide, now linked with **Para Hills**, celebrated its 119th anniversary on 15 September. It was founded as a mission charge of the (now defunct) Wakefield St Presbyterian Church in 1883. The anniversary service preacher was **Rev. Richard O'Brien** of Armidale, NSW. Current minister **Rev Dr Reg Mathews** began at the congregation in December 2000. The session and board are prayerfully thinking how the strategic location of the St. Giles' building (next to Norwood Oval and on The Parade with at least 65,000 cars passing each day) can be used to reach people for Christ. Norwood also offers a school of theology, including preparation for the Th. A. of the Australian College of Theology. For more details, contact Dr Mathews, 18 Aargon Road, Ingle Farm, or phone 03-8395 7841.

Toowoomba's double celebration

The North Toowoomba congregation of **St David's** commemorated 50 years of worship in the present building with a service on 28 July. A choir of 35 voices from **Fairholme College** led the praise. A morning tea was held in the original 1931 church hall, which was hauled by caterpillar tractor to the present site. The new church held its first service on 16 July 1952.

Rev. Graeme McKay was inducted into the charge of **South Toowoomba** on 14 August. The service was conducted by the Moderator, **Rev. Don Ashman**, and **Rev. Rowland Lowther** preached.

Malawi ministry

Melbourne theological student **Colin M'bawa** returns to Malawi next year to set up a theological training centre for pastors and lay preachers of the **Presbyterian Church of Malawi**. Colin is in his final year at the **Presbyterian Theological College**, Box Hill. An appeal has been launched for donations of good second-

Graham Charles Lake

1933 - 2002

Graham Charles Lake, a former Stanhope minister and Queensland moderator in 1988-89, passed away in August. Educated at Yeronga State School and State Commercial High School, he worked as a clerk in the Queensland Public Service for 12 years from 1948 before beginning training as a Presbyterian minister in 1960.

In 1958, Graham married **Barbara Roberts**, and the pair were blessed with three sons, **Peter, Ian and David**. Graham was inducted into the Stanthorpe Charge in December 1965, and served in a number of other charges. Graham loved the study and preaching of God's Word, and the pastoral ministry. He was a compassionate pastor who encouraged many to consider the challenge of the ministry. His contribution to the life and ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Queensland will be felt for many years to come.

Edward John Jakes

1912 – 2002

Edward Jakes, who served as minister of several New South Wales country parishes, passed away on 14 August, reports *Peter Currie*. The eldest of four sons living on a small dairy farm in south-east Queensland, he left school early to work on neighbouring farms, but always returned home to help his parents with the milking in the morning and evening.

Following an increasing conviction to serve the Lord in ministry, Ted made the three-day trip from Brisbane to Melbourne. From 1937 he attended the Melbourne Bible Institute where he met his wife, **Hazel**. After their marriage they spent several years serving the **Aboriginal Inland Mission** in Woorabinda (Qld) and Yass.

Ted served the Presbyterian Church at Walgett, Blacktown and Lake Cargelligo, where he was ordained in 1951, then at Culcairn, Corrimal, Wellington and Marrickville, where he retired in 1977 when nodules developed on his voice box. For 23 years after retiring, he served as clerk of the **Presbytery of Illawarra**. Following Hazel's death in 1999 Ted conducted regular devotions at Sencare, a seniors' ministry of the **Towradgi Congregational Church**.

hand and/or new Christian books (commentaries, pastoral care, theological books), as well as second-hand or new computers (at least three), Christian video cassettes and video playing equipment, overhead project/screen and white boards. For more details, contact the PTC Melbourne, or Mr M'bawa on 03 9376 7430.

Drought despair

Presbyterian Inland Mission workers encounter heartache and despair as the crippling drought continues to ravage the Inland. Many property owners are seeking agistment for their stock, some are feeding by hand, while others have simply sold out and cut their losses. At the moment the PIM is raising funds to upgrade the mission's 4WDs, some of

which may now be replaced next year. A new sub-committee of the PIM has been organised as a support group to raise funds to enough to enable a second patrol to start in Western Australia. Donations for this appeal can be sent to the PIM, PO Box 1508, Fortitude Valley, 4006.

Camping out in Queensland

The Queensland Committee on Outreach and Nurture has bought **Camp Moogarah**, which can cater to 270 people in dormitories, tents and caravans. Other facilities include a conference hall, basketball courts, four-hole bush golf course, sports field and the potential for water sports. Adventure facilities, including high and low ropes and an indoor rock-climbing will, will be installed soon. **Rev John Nichol**, director of Christian education, says that the camp means the church's camping ministry can be expanded.

across australia



Boost for church planting

With three quarters of Australian churches either in decline or not growing, the **Bible League** and **Church Resource Ministries** are combining to present a series of practical two-day seminars on church planting. The seminars cover resources, avoiding pitfalls, developing effective strategies, helping church leadership understand what an effective church-planter looks like, and more.

The speakers, all experienced church planters, are **Steve Elzinga**, director of the Bible League USA Ministries, **Ian Hamilton** from Church Resource Ministries and **John Rietveld**, missions coordinator for **Christian Reformed Churches**. The seminars are in Brisbane on 12 and 13 November, Sydney on 14 and 15 November, Melbourne on 18 and 19 November, and Launceston on 20 and 21 November.

Persecuted but triumphant

Difficult though it might be for Western Christians to believe, evangelical Protestant Christianity is the fastest growing religion in the world today, reports **Elizabeth Kendal** of the **World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission** (WEA RLC). In Nepal, for example, the first church was gathered in 1959 with 29 believers but now has an estimated 500,000 believers in some 3000 congregations. In Sudan, in 1960 only 5 per cent of the Southern Sudanese were Christian; today the figure is some 70 per cent.

Persecution is also on the rise. Persecution is not only a human rights issue; it is also a spiritual warfare issue and a mission issue. There are around two billion Christians in the world today, more than 70 per cent of whom live in the non-Western world, which is rife with corruption, poverty and conflict.

The **International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church** on 10 November, organised by WEA RLC, is a day to set aside for united global prayer for suffering believers. More than 300,000 congregations will pray together in unity of spirit across more than 130 nations. Information, devotionals, prayer requests, children's activities and more are available. Visit www.idop.org.

Ramadan ministry

The Bible League considers the Islamic month of Ramadan (5 November to 4 December) an ideal time for Christians in Australia to pray for Muslims everywhere, and place Scriptures in the hands of Christians who are oppressed and persecuted in Islamic countries.

The League wants Christians to be as disciplined in their praying as Muslims are during Ramadan. Its free seven-day prayer booklet, *Window on Islam*, may be used at any time during the month. An informative guide to understanding Islam, it gives Christians the opportunity to pray specifically for Muslims, and to put aside \$1 or more a day for 7 days to send Bibles. It costs just \$7 to place a copy of the Bible in one of the many countries where Islam is the dominant religion.

Contact the Bible League toll-free on 1800 800 937, or email info@bible-league.com, or write to PO Box 4071, Werrington, NSW 2747.

world news



Missionaries' children rescued

French troops backed by US forces have rescued 200 schoolchildren, mainly American and Canadian children of missionary workers across Africa, and teachers from the besieged **International Christian Academy** in the city of Bouake, Ivory Coast.

It ended a nearly week-long ordeal that began after a failed coup attempt in which at least 270 people died. The uprising began with a core group of about 800 former soldiers, who were angry over their dismissal from the army on suspicion of disloyalty.

As fighting continued, several shots were fired at the mission compound, where the children and teachers were holed up.

Assist News Service

Joy in Argentina

Argentina's **Wichí** people are rejoicing in the completion of a Bible in their own language, a 20-year project, according to an HCJB Radio update in September. Some 500 gathered at a dedication ceremony in August, led by **Rev Humberto Axt**, an Anglican bishop in northern Argentina.

Mr Viltes, one of the translators, emphasized that small native communities gain in dignity and feel less marginalised socially when they have the Bible in their own language. The **Argentine Bible Society** and the **Anglican Church** are working to produce literacy materials.

The Bible Society

Off-air in Cairo

SAT-7, the not-for-profit organisation which broadcasts to mainly Arab satellite television viewers in the Middle East and North Africa, suffered a reverse when fire destroyed the regional television production studio at its Cairo media centre. The centre, part of SAT-7's partnership with more than 30 agencies, including the **United Bible Societies** and **Campus Crusade for Christ**, had only been operating since mid-January. The cause of the fire has yet to be established.

The Bible Society in Australia

Tensions rise in Nigeria

The government of Plateau State, central Nigeria, has appealed for calm following a bomb explosion at a Christian church that has increased tensions in a region already

shaken by inter-religious violence. No deaths or injuries were reported after the explosion on September 11 at the Church of Christ in the state capital Jos.

It is reported that thousands have died since September last year, when inter-religious unrest first erupted in Plateau State. Until then the state had been largely untouched by the violence that has affected other northern and central states following moves by state governments to impose full Shariah (Islamic) law as state law in defiance of the country's secular constitution.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Java churches closed

Police have ordered the closure of two churches in Cikarang Barat, West Java, Indonesia. The buildings of the two churches were sealed by the authorities due to the reported objection of local people to the church buildings and activities of the Christians.

According to *The Barnabas Fund*, these latest closures follow the closure of four church buildings in nearby Cikarang Baru in July, plus two in Bandung and one in Malang. "In each case local objections have been cited as the reason for closure. However, Christians involved in these situations believe that extremist Islamic groups, who are opposed to Christian activities in these areas, are orchestrating the objections and complaints. Local officials deny this and claim it is merely a matter of obtaining the necessary permit to use a building for religious activities," reports The Barnabas Fund.



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A religion of peace?

Islam is at the crossroads, locked in a struggle for its soul.

Osama bin Laden, the world's most notorious terrorist, handed Muslims everywhere their worst public-relations nightmare: September 11 as a picture, an embodiment, of Islam. Muslims now have to define themselves in relation to the day of infamy.

Abdulaziz Sachedina, a Muslim scholar at the University of Virginia, says he does not remember ever praying so earnestly that God would spare Muslims the blame for "such madness that was unleashed upon New York and Washington... I felt the pain and, perhaps for the first time in my entire life, I felt embarrassed at the thought that it could very well be my fellow Muslims who had committed this horrendous act of terrorism. How could these terrorists invoke God's mercifulness and compassion when they had, through their evil act, put to shame the entire history of this great religion and its culture of toleration?"

Every judgment about Islam, all reaction to Muslim doctrine, and each Muslim-Christian encounter are now cast in light of the events of that dreadful day.

There are three distinct interpretations of the events of September 11. The first view is that the terrorist acts do not represent Islam. President George W. Bush best expressed this notion when he said that "Islam is a religion of peace". One of the leading Muslims to echo this is Yusuf Islam (the former rock musician Cat Stevens, who now helps promote Muslim education in England). "Today, I am aghast at the horror of recent events and feel it a duty to speak out," he said in a London newspaper. "Not only did terrorists hijack planes and destroy life; they also hijacked the beautiful religion of Islam."

During an interfaith ceremony at Yankee Stadium on September 23, Imam Izak-El M. Pasha pleaded: "Do not allow the ignorance of people to have you attack your good neighbours. We are Muslims, but we are Americans. We Muslims, Americans, stand today with a heavy weight on our shoulders that those who would dare do such dastardly acts claim our faith. They are no believers in God at all."

James A. Beverley

Major Muslim organisations throughout North America, including the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the Islamic Society of North America, and the Muslim Students Association, denounced the work of the terrorists. The powerful American Muslim Council issued a press release on September 11, saying it "strongly condemns this morning's plane attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon and expresses deep sorrow for Americans that were injured and killed. AMC sends out its

"Osama bin Laden is to Islam what Timothy McVeigh is to Christianity."

condolences to all the families of the victims of this cowardly terrorist attack".

With the exception of Iraq, Muslim nations distanced themselves from the attack on

America. "Iran has vehemently condemned the suicidal terrorist attacks in the United States," *Iran Today* reported in a front-page story on September 24, "and has expressed its deep sorrow and sympathy with the American nation." The governments of Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen expressed similar sentiments.

Leading intellectuals, who have argued that terrorist acts represent only fringe Muslims, have also promoted the view that Islam is a religion of peace. Edward Said, the controversial Columbia University professor, argued in *The Nation* that September 11 is an act of cultic religion. Comparing Islamists to the Branch Davidians and Rev. Jim Jones, he said September 11 is a model of "the carefully planned and horrendous, pathologically motivated suicide attack and mass slaughter by a small group of deranged militants ... the capture of big ideas by a

tiny band of crazed fanatics for criminal purposes."

Mark Juergensmeyer, professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara and a specialist on religious violence, put it similarly: "Osama bin Laden is to Islam [what] Timothy McVeigh is to Christianity."

After initial emphasis on Islam as a religion of peace, a second interpretation came to the fore. Editorials started to emerge that were less optimistic about Islam per se and far more alarmed about the scope and depth of militant Islam.

Novelist Salman Rushdie, on whom the late Ayatollah Khomeini once issued a death order, wrote in *The New York Times*: "If this isn't about Islam, why the worldwide Muslim demonstrations in support of Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda? Why did those 10,000 men armed with swords and axes mass on the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier, answering some mullah's call to jihad? Why are the war's first British casualties three Muslim men who died fighting on the Taliban side? ... [Islamists have] a loathing of modern society in general, riddled as it is with music, godlessness, and sex; and a more particularised loathing (and fear) of the prospect that their own immediate surroundings could be taken over — "Westoxicated" — by the liberal Western-style way of life.

Poverty is their great helper, and the fruit of their efforts is paranoia. This paranoid Islam, which blames outsiders, "infidels", for all the ills of Muslim societies, and whose proposed remedy is the closing of those societies to the rival project of modernity, is presently the fastest growing version of Islam in the world."

Others have been naming Islam's dark side as well, without suggesting that all Muslims are terrorists. Thomas Friedman, author of *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, has taunted Osama bin Laden in his New York Times columns, while also warning of the terrorist's popularity in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and other Muslim nations.

British journalist Julie Burchill wrote a scathing article in *The Guardian* against the "sustained effort on the part of the

British media to present Islam – even after the Rushdie affair and now during the Taliban’s reign of terror – as something essentially ‘joyous’ and ‘vibrant,’ sort of like Afro-Caribbean culture, only with fasting and fatwas.”

Melanie Phillips, writing in *The Times* of London, raised the possibility of treason among British Muslims. “As if the progress of the Afghan war wasn’t enough to worry about, a nightmare spectre is emerging at home. The attitude of many British Muslims should cause the greatest possible alarm that we have a fifth column in our midst.”

In the weeks after the World Trade Centre crumbled, there was no proof of an Islamic world totally united against terrorism. Rick Bragg reported in *The New York Times* about Muslim boys running through their school compounds in Pakistan on September 11. They were “celebrating, stabbing the fingers on one hand into the palm of the other, to simulate a plane stabbing into a building.” Palestinian authorities went into overdrive to suppress images of youths celebrating the deaths in America.

There is, finally, the view that September 11 represents authentic Islam, a notion adopted by Osama bin Laden and his many followers. His revolutionary zeal lacks no clarity. “The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies — civilians and military — is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it,” he said in February 1998. Muslim extremists from Bangladesh, Egypt, and Pakistan also signed this fatwa, titled “Urging jihad against Americans”. Bin Laden told ABC News producer Rahimullah Yousafzai last winter that he would kill his own children, if it were necessary, to hit American targets.

Ironically, some Christian writers have also advanced the view that September 11 represents true Islam. Of these, the most influential is Robert A. Morey, the popular evangelical cult-watcher, who in recent years has targeted Islam as a deadly religion. Author of *The Islamic Invasion*, Morey has often debated leading Muslim apologists, in fiery exchanges that have led to mob attacks on him and repeated calls for his death. Morey has accused Mohammed of being a racist, a murderer, an irrational zealot, and a paedophile.

After September 11, Morey announced a spiritual crusade against Islam, and invited Christians to sign this pledge:

“In response to the Muslim Holy War

now being waged against us, We, the undersigned, following the example of the Christian Church since the 7th century, do commit ourselves, our wealth, and our families to join in a Holy Crusade to fight against Islam and its false god, false prophet, and false book. We, the undersigned, believe that Islam is the root of all Muslim terrorism, which is the fruit of Islam.”

Christian scholars have criticised Morey for his invective, but he remains unmoved. He has argued that Muslims will start World War III.

Sorting through these three interpretations demands analysis of some deeper issues. First, we must come to grips with the vast unrest in the Islamic world, both now and over the last two centuries. There has been a growing radicalisation in Islam since the early 1800s, both in response to the spread of Western colonialism and the demise of Muslim political supremacy.

Osama bin Laden traces his radicalism to the Wahhabism of his native Saudi Arabia, a movement that began with the reformer Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab (1703–87), an advocate of a puritanical reading of Islamic law and belief. The Wahhabis threatened the interests of the Ottoman Turks and, in concert with the Saud dynasty, eventually gained control of Mecca and Medina, Islam’s holiest cities.

A fundamentalist thrust in Islam emerged in Egypt as well, with the formation of the Muslim Brotherhood (also known as Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun) in 1927. Tormented first by the presence of British rule and then by a tepid Muslim government, brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, his chief intellectual heir, sought by any means, including violence, to restore true Islamic rule to Egypt.

The brotherhood started branches in Jordan and Syria, and militant groups in India, Iran, and Iraq imitated its radicalism. Muhammad Nawab-Safavi started his Fedayeen-e-Islami movement in Iran in the 1930s and told his followers: “Throw away your beads and get a gun: for beads keep you silent while guns silence the enemies of Islam.”

Abul A’la Maududi organised his militant Jamaat-e-Islami in the Punjab in 1941. After the creation of Pakistan in 1947, Maududi tried repeatedly to convince the government to adopt his stricter version of Islamic rule.

Western awareness of militant Islam came with the radical overthrow of the Shah of Iran in 1979 and the establishment of harsh Shariah law under the Ayatollah Khomeini. American exposure to Islamic fundamentalism came with the arrest of Americans in Tehran, the bombing of the World Trade Centre in 1993, the explosions at US embassies in Africa, the attack on the USS Cole in Yemen, and then the horrors of September 11.

Every discussion of Islamic militancy turns eventually to two fundamental concerns. First, how much is Islamism (that practised by fundamentalist Muslims open to violence) rooted in the teaching and practice of the prophet Mohammed? Would he celebrate the work of Osama bin Laden? Second, are the violent jihads of our day sanctioned by the Qur’an and by the actions of early Muslim leaders?

The prophet himself engaged in many military battles and could be merciless to his enemies, even those who simply attacked him verbally. His original sympathies with Jews and Christians as “Peoples of the Book” gave way to a harsher treatment when they did not follow Islam. In one infamous episode, Mohammed cut the heads off hundreds of Jewish males of the Beni Quraiza tribe who did not side with him in battle. The prophet is quoted as saying, “The sword is the key of heaven and hell; a drop of blood shed in the cause of Allah, a night spent in arms, is of more avail than two months of fasting or prayer: whosoever falls in battle, his sins are forgiven, and at the day of judgment his limbs shall be supplied by the wings of angels and cherubim.”

In reference to the Qur’an, many have drawn attention to the famous passage in Surah 2:256: “Let there be no compulsion in religion.” This verse fits well with other Qur’an verses in which jihad means personal and communal spiritual struggle or striving. But the Qur’an also uses jihad to mean “holy war”, and the language can be extreme. Surah 5:33 reads, “The punishment of those who wage war against God and His Messenger, and strive with might and main for mischief through the land is: execution, or crucifixion, or cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides, or exile from the land: that is their disgrace in

The vast majority of Muslims believe that nothing in Mohammed’s life or in the Qur’an or Islamic law justifies terrorism.

this world, and a heavy punishment is theirs in the Hereafter.”

Both the example of the prophet and some emphases in the Qur'an provided warrant for Islam's earliest leaders to spread Islam by military conquest. Bloody expansionism was also justified through original Islamic law that divided the world into two realms: Dar al-Harb (the land of war) and Dar al-Islam (land under Islamic rule). Both Paul Fregosi's *Jihad in the West* and Jewish scholar Bat Ye'or's *Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam* document the reality of Muslim crusades long before the notorious Christian crusades of the Middle Ages.

Out of the vortex of these realities emerge two different perspectives among modern Muslims. Islamists consider their actions a true jihad or “holy war” against infidels and the enemies of Islam. They believe it is right to target America, “the great Satan”. Osama bin Laden believes that the Qur'an supports his campaign, that the prophet would bless his cause, and that Allah is on his side. But the vast majority of Muslims believe that nothing in Mohammed's life or in the Qur'an or Islamic law justifies terrorism.

Bernard Lewis, the great historian of Islam, noted in *The Wall Street Journal* that throughout history, Muslims have given jihad both spiritual and military meaning. Lewis also pays particular attention to the legal traditions in Islam about what constitutes just war. After noting the many limitations placed on military jihad, he writes, “What the classical jurists of Islam never remotely considered is the kind of unprovoked, unannounced mass slaughter of uninvolved civil populations that we saw in New York. For this there is no precedent and no authority in Islam.”

“The Clash of Civilisations,” Samuel Huntington's essay for *Foreign Affairs* (Summer, 1993), has attracted considerable attention in recent months. Writing just after the Gulf War, Huntington analysed the competing ideologies of our time and drew particular attention to the clash between Islam and the West. His concern has obvious merit, although critics have made a crucial point that Islam is no monolith. There are clashes within Islamic civilisation itself.

What may emerge as the most significant factor in the current shape of our world, then, is not the clash between Islam and the West. It is, instead, the clash between Muslims as they try to define their faith for the 21st century. Islam clearly does not speak with one voice. It shows nearly as much diversity as does

Christianity. The debate within Islam will be protracted, regardless of how long military campaigns continue against any Islamist movement.

The Palestinian question has also fueled the growth of Islamic militancy. Tensions in Palestine between Muslims and Jews date back to the first wave of Jewish immigrants in the late 1800s. The British government's 1917 Balfour Declaration heightened Arab unrest, as did the United Nations' support for a Jewish state 30 years later, leading to the formation of the State of Israel in May 1948.

Five wars between Arabs and Jews since Israel's formation create the context for modern Muslim-Jewish hostilities. These tensions increased with the rise of the first Intifada (“uprising”) in 1987, and a second Intifada in 2000, following the

breakdown of talks at Camp David between Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Islamic militant groups like Hamas and Hezbollah call for an armed jihad against

Islam is no monolith. There are clashes within Islamic civilisation itself.

Israel. Many Palestinian Muslims celebrate the attack on America but also claim it was really the work of the CIA and Israel's Mossad.

In the mix of all this turmoil is the seemingly endless cycle of violence in Israel and Palestine. Palestinian terrorist attacks seem unremitting. On the other hand, writers as diverse as Noam Chomsky, Hans Küng, Michael Lerner, Edward Said, and David Grossman (author of *The Yellow Wind*) argue for recognising injustices done against Palestinians by Israel. They also argue for stronger American complaints against Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. In the past 15 years, the case for a Palestinian state has grown more popular among moderate Jews and many analysts sympathetic to Israel.

“With or without Islamic fundamentalism, with or without Arab terrorism, there is no justification whatsoever for the lasting occupation and suppression of the Palestinian people by Israel,” Israeli novelist Amos Oz wrote in a *New York Times* editorial. “We have no right to deny Palestinians their natural right to self-determination ... Two huge oceans

could not shelter America from terrorism; the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza by Israel has not made Israel secure — on the contrary, it makes our self-defence much harder and more complicated. The sooner this occupation ends, the better it will be for Palestinians and Israelis alike.”

Beyond the issue of Palestine lies another concern. Is Islam fundamentally opposed to human rights by its inherently theocratic thrust? Why do Muslim countries have such deplorable records on human rights? Data made available by Freedom House, an organisation that monitors political and civil rights in every country of the world, supports this assertion. Of the 41 countries whose population is at least 70 per cent Muslim, 26 are considered not free, and 13 are partly free. Only two are free — meaning they protect political and civil rights as defined by the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

Why is it that the government of Saudi Arabia welcomed allied forces to free Kuwait but forbids entry of non-Muslims to its country? Western governments allow Muslims to talk freely about their faith. Why can't Christians do the same in many Muslim countries? Muslims rightfully express concern about the denial of liberties to Palestinians. But are the rights of Jews protected in Indonesia? Are Hindus free in Pakistan?

Human beings are being traded as slaves in Sudan, a fact documented in Paul Marshall's *Their Blood Cries Out*. Has the government in Khartoum been flooded with protests from every corner of the Muslim world? Likewise, no one can deny the lack of women's rights under Islam, regardless of Muslim apologists' passion to the contrary. Women are forbidden even to drive a car in Saudi Arabia. Followers of Jesus in many Muslim countries can be put to death for sharing what they believe.

In 1999 I had lunch with an American whose identity I must conceal who told me of a simple but life-altering fact. A few years earlier, he realised that he no longer believed in Islam, and he abandoned his faith. As a result, he received death threats — not in Sudan, or Libya, or Iraq, but in the United States. Are American Muslim leaders disturbed that members of their communities threaten former Muslims with death? Do American Muslims long for adoption of shariah law, which would mandate that Muslims who abandon their faith be put to death?

Though many Muslims have tried to blame America and Israel for all the ills of the Muslim world, a rising number of Muslim intellectuals are calling for a new and radical self-criticism within Islam. This point has been articulated best by Kanan Makiya, author of *Republic of Fear* (on Saddam Hussein's Iraq) and *Cruelty and Silence* (a powerful protest against the timidity of Arab intellectuals to address the dark side of the militant Islamic Middle East).

Makiya writes in a London *Observer* article, "Fighting Islam's Ku Klux Klan: 'Arabs and Muslims need today to face up to the fact that their resentment at America has long since become unmoored from any rational underpinnings it might once have had; like the anti-Semitism of the interwar years, it is today steeped in deeply embedded conspiratorial patterns of thought rooted in profound ignorance of how a society and a polity like the United States, much less Israel, functions.'"

His article ends with these words: "Muslims and Arabs have to be on the front lines of a new kind of war, one that is worth waging for their own salvation and in their own souls. And that, as good out-of-fashion Muslim scholars will tell you, is the true meaning of jihad, a mean-

ing that has been hijacked by terrorists and suicide bombers and all those who applaud or find excuses for them. To exorcise what they have done in our name is the civilisational challenge of the 21st century for every Arab and Muslim in the world today."

The events of September 11 have led some non-Muslims to reconsider their rhetoric against the United States and Israel. Here is the Australian activist, Helen Darville, author of *The Hand that Signed the Paper*. She writes: "I have watched, since that day, the cozy leftist pieties of my youth disintegrate ... The images of Palestinians cheering as planes carved into skyscrapers made me sick at heart. One fat woman in ugly specs will stay with me for a long time. Don't go there, I chanted under my breath as she ululated with joy. Don't go there. That's where the Nazis went, and that way lies madness. There are accounts beyond number of Eastern European peasants cheering German executioners on, trying to pry the carbines from their hands: let me shoot them, Herr Soldat.

"A lot of these peasants were raised in the church. Christian anti-Semitism has a long and terrible history, as does Christian aggression against Islam during the Crusades and against fellow Christians

during the Wars of Religion. But after each outpouring of violence, the church has been forced to ask itself: Is this what Christianity is about? Is this what Christ came for? Is this how we want to live in his name?

"In time the answers came, and except for small, radical fringes, Christianity as a whole has repudiated war, coercion, and hate as ways to further the Christian message."

Islam stands at such a crossroads since September 11. The tensions it has been facing for centuries have risen to the surface. Is Islam a religion of peace? Does it believe in human rights? Can it find a way to be a part of the human community without violently insisting on its own way?

We hear so many differing accounts of Islam today precisely because Muslims are in the midst of a struggle for the soul of Islam. We would be wise as Christians, humbled by our own past, to remember that as we seek to understand and engage Muslims today out of love for Christ.

James A. Beverley is professor of theology and ethics at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto. He is author of Understanding Islam. This article is reprinted from Christianity Today. ap

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A testing case

A complaint under Victoria's new tolerance law has reinforced Christian fears.

While Australia has long considered itself a multi-cultural melting pot in the most positive of senses, the global climate of increasing suspicion and unrest is affecting the way governments are dealing with what they perceive as some of the threats to national harmony.

Tolerance is seen as the balm to soothe the various tensions, a virtue which seems all the more important since September 11.

In this vein, the Victorian Government recently enacted a law to try to deal with discrimination on the grounds of race or religion. The Racial and Religious Tolerance Act makes it unlawful to severely offend, insult or humiliate a person on the grounds of their race or religion.

The legislation provides Victorians, who feel that they have been victims of vilifying behaviour based on their racial or religious backgrounds, with an avenue of redress that is "inexpensive and accessible", according to the Victorian Government.

While this legislation may seem at first glance to be a reasonable step – after all, severely offending, insulting or humiliating a person because of their race or religious beliefs is something that none of us endorses – concerns have been raised that the legislation violates the very democracy it is supposedly trying to protect.

The Racial and Religious Tolerance Act came into force in Victoria on 1 January

**Tracy
Gordon**

2002. The initial invitation by the State Labor Government for submissions received some 5500 responses, most opposing the proposal. The act was then amended, and passed in the Lower House by 69 votes to 11, and in the Upper House by 32 votes to 9.

Since religions make claims about truth and morality in the public domain, they should be subject to scrutiny and challenge.

people in society to engage in it fully as individuals. The act strikes an appropriate balance with freedom of expression by imposing liability only upon the most repugnant behavior that actively urges and promotes hate."

To protect free speech and allow for discussion of matters in the public interest, the act provides exceptions for artists, scientists, religious discussions and the media. There are, however, limitations to

these exceptions and for an exception to apply, an activity must be done "reasonably and in good faith". An exception also exists for private conversations or behavior that may take place, for example, in a private home which is not intended to be heard by anyone else.

The act covers public behavior, including communications over the Internet and email, which have the effect of inciting hatred, serious contempt for, or severe ridicule of people's racial or religious backgrounds and practices. It provides for both civil and criminal sanctions.

The legislation has already received widespread attention due to a complaint made by the Islamic Council of Victoria on behalf of three individuals who attended a seminar about Islam conducted by a church in Victoria earlier this year.

The complainants claimed that in a seminar conducted by Catch The Fire Ministries at which Pastor Daniel Scot was the main speaker, in a newsletter distributed by Catch The Fire Ministries, and in an article on a website produced and maintained by Catch The Fire Ministries, they have been vilified "on the basis of their Islamic faith". They complained that "Catch The Fire Ministries Inc, (senior pastor) Daniel Nalliah and Daniel Scot engaged in conduct that incited hatred against, serious contempt for, or revulsion or severe ridicule of the Islamic faith".

The complainants also consider that the conduct they report could not be described as "having been engaged in reasonably and in good faith... for any religious purpose".

While the Equal Opportunity Commission did not find that the complaints of religious vilification against Catch the Fire Ministries were proven, this case highlights some of the shortcomings of the act in terms of its wording and the proper definition of various terms.

There are several concerns about the implications of the Act. It impinges on free speech, leaves employers liable for the behaviour of employees, allows children to take action through an organisation and leaves the interpretation of appropriate behaviour to the Equal

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Opportunity Commission. The act proposes to increase the level of tolerance for religious and racial diversity, yet it encourages people to bring legal action against one another in a move which can only be interpreted as divisive in its nature.

According to the Festival of Light: "Laws against discrimination and vilification are in essential conflict with fundamental freedoms that have long been at the heart of free democratic societies: the freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of contract."

As the South Australian Festival of Light pointed out in the September issue of its publication *Focus*: "Voluntary associations – based on common beliefs and purpose (like churches, political parties or trade unions), or a common interest (like sporting clubs) – provide a buffer between the individual and government. They constitute a considerable check on governmental exercise of arbitrary power. History shows that would-be tyrants try to impose government control on youth groups, schools, unions and other parts of civil society.

"The decline of civic institutions in Western societies during recent decades is an ominous warning of a drift towards tyranny. A factor contributing to this civic decline is the proliferation of legislation such as anti-discrimination laws which champion individual rights at the expense of the right of private organisations to control their own affairs. An extension of anti-discrimination laws to prohibit religious discrimination could stifle religious organisations and undermine their ability to serve their members."

The *Focus* article also warned: "Another fundamental freedom too easily taken for granted is freedom of contract. The freedom to enter contracts is an essential element of modern democratic societies ... In the USA the right to make and

enforce contracts is among the liberties protected by the US Constitution. Twentieth century history provides ample evidence that the prohibition of private contracts by tyrannical regimes such as the former Soviet Union contributed to their economic stagnation and ultimate collapse.

"Anti-discrimination laws conflict with the freedom of contract and interfere with employers engaging staff, businesses providing services and property owners renting or selling properties. A prohibition of religious discrimination would hinder small businesses with religious owners who want to enhance efficiency by selecting staff with shared beliefs and values."

The Victorian-based Christian ethics group Salt Shakers observes that "vilification" and "inciting hatred" are not defined in the legislation. Instead, it has been left to the Equal Opportunity Commission and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to interpret the meaning of these terms.

In its submission to the Equal Opportunities Commission of Victoria in reply to the complaints, Catch the Fire Ministries makes an important distinction. "The Racial and Religious Tolerance Act treats religion and race on an identical basis. However a race is not the same thing as a religion. Religions are belief systems. They determine a whole world-view. They may require specific political systems and specific laws. They can contribute significantly to shaping their adherents' views on matters that are of public significance. Religions determine and shape public and private behaviour. Race does not."

Catch the Fire claims that since religions make claims about truth and morality in the public domain, they should be subject to scrutiny and challenge. It is therefore legitimate to criticise religious beliefs.

Normally the claims of religions are "public truth", so it is in the public interest for their claims to be contested, Catch the Fire maintains. For Christianity and Islam the revealed authorities which determine their character include their

scriptures, and the lives of their founders. These should be subjected to critical scrutiny. For example, the life of Jesus Christ should be able to be held up for examination to consider what principles he taught, and whether he lived by them. The same applies to Mohammed.

Catch the Fire said: "The right to critically examine a faith should not be restricted to those who adhere to it. All people have the right, under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to change their religious beliefs, and critical examination of other belief systems is an integral part of that process.

Therefore critically examining a religious belief system is an entirely legitimate religious activity — it is a fundamental human right — and it is in the public interest that it occur freely."

The Victorian Racial and Religious Tolerance Act has created an unhealthy environment where normal critical engagement of opposing religious viewpoints is being mischievously misconstrued as "vilification".

This, according to the Festival of Light in a document to the South Australian Attorney-General, is "a consequence of the appalling feature of the Victorian legislation, which states that the intent of the offender is irrelevant to the question of whether or not vilification has occurred".

Tracy Gordon is a Sydney journalist. 

Normal critical engagement of opposing religious viewpoints is being mischievously misconstrued as "vilification".

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prayer

NOVEMBER 2002

- 21 Through their current fasting month (Ramadan) pray that the world's Muslims may have revealed to them that Isa (Jesus) is truly Son of God and the sacrifice for our sins.
- 22 The vacant Warialda home mission station, NW NSW; about 35 communicants and adherents, and 1 elder.
- 23 Pray for all bereaved or injured in the Bali bombing last month, and for world leaders to act against terrorism and seek and secure peace.
- 24 Western Region Chinese home mission station, Bonnyrigg Sydney; about 90 adherents and communicants, 30 young people and 2 elders.
- 25 "Crossroads" Hobart special parish David Jones and its impact for the gospel.
- 26 Leeton parish, southern NSW; about 160 communicants and adherents, 20 younger folk and 6 elders; Richard Keith.
- 27 Presbytery of Hastings, NSW north coast; 7 parishes and 2 home mission stations totalling about 18 congregations with 1190 communicants and adherents, 2 retired ministers, 1 under jurisdiction; John Rooimans clerk.
- 28 During Ramadan continue to pray for Muslims and that Christians may show them the love of the Father.
- 29 Warwick and Kathy Vincent from Hurstville congregation, Sydney, serving with Youth Ministries Australia (Campus Crusade for Christ) in Melbourne.
- 30 The vacant Moruya-Narooma parish on the NSW south coast including also Tuross Heads; about 80 communicants and adherents, 15 younger folk and 12 elders.

DECEMBER

- 1 Phillipa Crossan from Ashfield congregation, Sydney, serving under European Christian Mission/APWM particularly in the ECM bookshop and with overseas students.
- 2 Albion Park home mission station near Wollongong, NSW, including Shellharbour; about 90 communicants and adherents, 35 younger folk and 7 elders.
- 3 Ashley and Sarah Manly from Croydon Hills congregation, Melbourne, serving under Middle East Christian Outreach/APWM to employ their computing and hospitality skills.
- 4 As Ramadan ends pray that millions of Muslims will know liberty through faith in Christ.
- 5 Christie and Leah Balzer as they prepared to take up a teaching role at Talua Ministry Training Centre, Sanmto, Vanuatu.
- 6 The vacant Young parish, southern NSW; about 100 communicants and adherents, 5 younger folk and 8 elders.
- 7 Presbytery of Torrens, SA; 3 parishes and 4 home mission stations totalling 9 congregations with 440 communicants and adherents, 3 retired ministers; Mary McGregor clerk.
- 8 Thank God for the more than 30 years of auxiliary service of Harold and Gladys (Hap and Glad) Skinner from Ku-ring-gai congregation, Sydney, with Wycliffe Bible Translators in PNG and Darwin, and ask God to bless them as they retire to the USA.
- 9 Sunshine parish, western Melbourne; about 65 communicants and adherents, 5 younger folk and elders; Cor Vanderhorn.
- 10 Henty parish, southern NSW, includ-

- ing Lockhart, Culcairn, Yerong Creek and Pleasant Hills; about 175 communicants and adherents, 12 younger folk and 28 elders; Peter Greiner.
- 11 Elspeth Slater as she resumes ministry to Gourma pastors' wives in Burkina Faso, west Africa. She comes from Canterbury congregation, Melbourne.
- 12 Caringbah parish, southern Sydney; about 160 communicants and adherents, 45 younger folk and 15 elders; Graham Flick.
- 13 St George Dirranbandi parish, western Queensland; about 60 communicants and adherents, 16 younger folk and 5 elders; Keith Harris.
- 14 Cessnock home mission station, western Newcastle; about 125 communicants and adherents, 65 younger folk and 6 elders; Dennis Webster.
- 15 Croydon Hills parish, Melbourne; about 85 communicants and adherents, 2 younger folk and 10 elders; John Diacos.
- 16 Students going on holiday and anticipating a new stage of education or employment in 2003.
- 17 Presbytery of North Qld; 8 parishes and 3 home mission stations totalling 16 congregations with 1050 communicants and adherents, 3 defense force chaplains, 1 PIM patrol padre, 1 retired minister, 1 under jurisdiction, John Trappett clerk.
- 18 The historic Maitland parish, NSW Hunter Valley, including Largs and Paterson; about 110 communicants and adherents, 8 younger folk and 20 elders; Stephen de Plater.
- 19 Pray that the gospel may figure prominently in all Christmas observances.
- 20 Pray that TEAR Australia will be well supported this Christmas.

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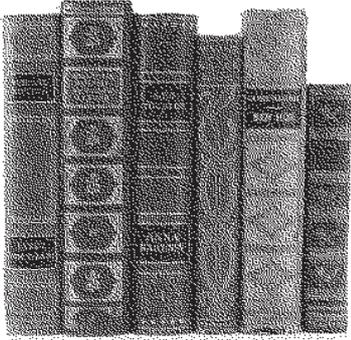
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books



Selina, Countess of Huntingdon

Faith Cook

Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001

Reviewed by Mignon Goswell

Faith Cook, a well-known biographer, has written a new book of great value for our understanding of the 18th century awakening in England and Wales. Written with previously unpublished source material at her disposal, she presents to us a remarkable woman in Selina.

This woman of deep commitment to the extension of God's kingdom on earth has much to teach our generation. Her relentless drive to have her friends hear the finest preachers in the country challenges us. Her willingness to use her considerable wealth to finance the construction of 64 chapels, the opening of many other places of worship and the founding of the Trevecca College in Wales is a great example. Her commitment to encouraging many people through an amazing correspondence regime should inspire us and, above all, her dedication to serving her master with every day and every means at her disposal humbles us.

This biography places many remarkable people in church history into context. What an amazing time it was! The relationships between the Wesleys, Whitfield, Harris, Fletcher and many others are explored through the relationship each shared with Selina. Henry Venn said of her, "In the Countess of Huntingdon I see a star of the first magnitude in the firmament of the church."

Cook has dealt with the theological issues that united these church leaders as well as those that at times brought division. It is an honest evaluation of sometimes errors of judgement by Selina and others. There are challenges for us to shrewdly assess the essentials of the Christian faith. Selina saw herself as a

facilitator allowing many great preachers to do their work. We see Selina's depression at times, especially over her husband's early death and also over her children. Only one of her six children outlived her. She also grieved over the deaths of many dear friends.

This book comes highly recommended for all – as a biography, as a piece of church history and as an inspiration to personal godliness. Our lives are enriched by knowing more of those who have gone before us.

Mignon Goswell, a former high school teacher, now mother of four, worships at Canterbury Presbyterian Church, Vic.

Shifting Sands to Solid Rock:

90 Years of Frontier Services

Rob Linn

Frontier Services, 2002.

Reviewed by Stuart Bonnington

Frontier Services, the successor in the Uniting Church to the Australian Inland Mission which was founded by the GAA in 1912 with the Rev. John Flynn as its first Superintendent, has issued this very attractive book to mark the 90th anniversary of the formally organised Presbyterian (and since 1977 Uniting Church) work in the Outback.

The text is interesting and generally informed although sometimes certain expressions are not as clear as strict historic accuracy would demand. The presentation of the book however is in every sense outstanding, with many of John Flynn's own magnificent photographs being the main feature.

As this is a Uniting Church book the Methodist Inland Mission gets a good mention, which is entirely appropriate as are the passing references to the Congregational Church. We need to know more about the Methodists (especially) in the Inland. Speaking ecumenically, it is a bit surprising that there is no mention or acknowledgment of any kind of the on-going work of the Presbyterian Inland Mission the successor since 1977 in the Presbyterian Church of Australia to the AIM.

Notwithstanding this, *Shifting Sands to Solid Rock* deserves a wide readership and circulation.

Stuart Bonnington is minister of South Yarra Presbyterian Church, Vic.

The Preachers of Scotland From the 6th Century to the 19th Century

William G. Blaikie

Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1888, reprinted 2001.

Reviewed by Peter Barnes

William Blaikie was a clear preacher himself, and he is well able to write a helpful survey of the preachers of Scotland. The result is something of an overview of Scottish Church history, using preachers as illustrations of its ebb and flow.

Blaikie is warmly sympathetic to the evangelical faith, but is astute enough and honest enough to face all facts. He says, rightly, that Celtic theology has been presented as more Calvinistic than it was. He also acknowledges that the Covenants of 1638 and 1643 – although they achieved much good – were nevertheless used as instruments of coercion. The Scottish pulpit, in Blaikie's opinion, has lacked a certain gentleness. We are also subjected to an unwitting lesson from Ebenezer Erskine on how not to treat a text – see pp.207-8 for what he does to 'The king is held in the galleries'. Origen could not have been more imaginative!

History always uncovers some odd and interesting facts – the redoubtable Henry Erskine played the zither, the evangelical Dr Alexander Webster could drink any jovial companion under the table, and Dr Andrew Thomson – of severe reputation – was a performer and composer of music. There are some splendid descriptions of pulpit style. Thomas Chalmers' addresses are said to be "a boiling, foaming current, a mingled stream of exposition, illustration, and application, directed to the one great object of moving his audience to action."

Blaikie has some wise words to say about preaching – that it is no policy simply to hate change; that one needs to appeal to reason, conscience and feeling in order to overcome inveterate human tendency to evil; and that, with the exception of Robert Leighton, the best preachers were also the staunchest fighters. Reading Blaikie's work is a lesson both in history and in preaching, which makes it doubly worthwhile.

Peter Barnes is minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, NSW, and AP's books editor.

Twisted tolerance

Distinctions between Islam and Western culture are being whitewashed.

Americans may be surprised to learn what their kids may soon be treated to at school: huge helpings of politically correct nonsense.

The first lesson is: We have no idea who flew those jets into the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. Thus, we have no business assigning blame or even suggesting that certain parties might be responsible.

As the National Education Association guidelines put it, "We still believe that all people are innocent until solid, reliable evidence from legal authorities proves otherwise." I thought the video-tape of Osama bin Laden and his cohorts celebrating their success was evidence enough – you know, the tape where they say that the attacks on America went even better than they'd expected.

Then there's the program put together by scholars at my alma mater Brown University that will be taught at more than 1000 high schools. It's called "Responding to Terrorism: Challenges for Democracy". Student readings emphasise that Islam "is a religion that values family and tolerance," and that "throughout much of history, Muslims have lived peacefully with followers of other religions". They did – but only after they conquered the Middle East, North Africa, and much of Europe in holy wars.

The "Islam is peaceful" message was recently reinforced at the University of North Carolina, when freshmen were assigned selections of the Qur'an – peaceful selections, that is. The parts about how it is the duty of Muslims to kill Jews, Christians, and other "infidels" the parts about holy wars that are of vital importance in light of September 11 were somehow left out.

The problem is not so much that kids are being taught about Islam or even asked to read the Qur'an – though I have my objections to that. The problem is that there is no balance in those teachings. In the name of tolerance, Islam is being whitewashed; the distinctions between Islam and Western culture are being sys-



Charles Colson

tematically scrubbed.

Ravi Zacharias warns of the dangers of misapplied "tolerance" that trashes the truth. As he puts it, "truth cannot be sac-

True tolerance is treating our neighbours with Christ-like charity – even if we disagree with their beliefs.

rificed at the altar of pretended tolerance". "Real tolerance," he reminds us, "is deference to all ideas, not indifference to the truth." Ravi has got it exactly right. The differences between Islam and

Christianity are real and deep. They constitute the basis of the war we are in – and the wars that Muslims are currently fighting against dozens of other countries around the globe.

Sadly, the "tolerance" lessons appear to be paying off. The *New York Times*

reports that University of North Carolina students who read the assigned segments from the Qur'an were "surprised to find parallels between Islam and Christianity". And the September 11 lessons directed at primary school children, with their stern warnings regarding how kids ought to and ought not to think about the terror attacks, may well coerce them into silence.

Look into what your school is teaching your kids. Are they being given hefty helpings of what's passed off as "tolerance" these days, the notion that we're not allowed to judge anyone, even people who blow up buildings? If so, feed your kids a healthy serving of the truth: There are objective standards of right and wrong, and true tolerance is treating our neighbours with Christ-like charity – even if we disagree with their beliefs.

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