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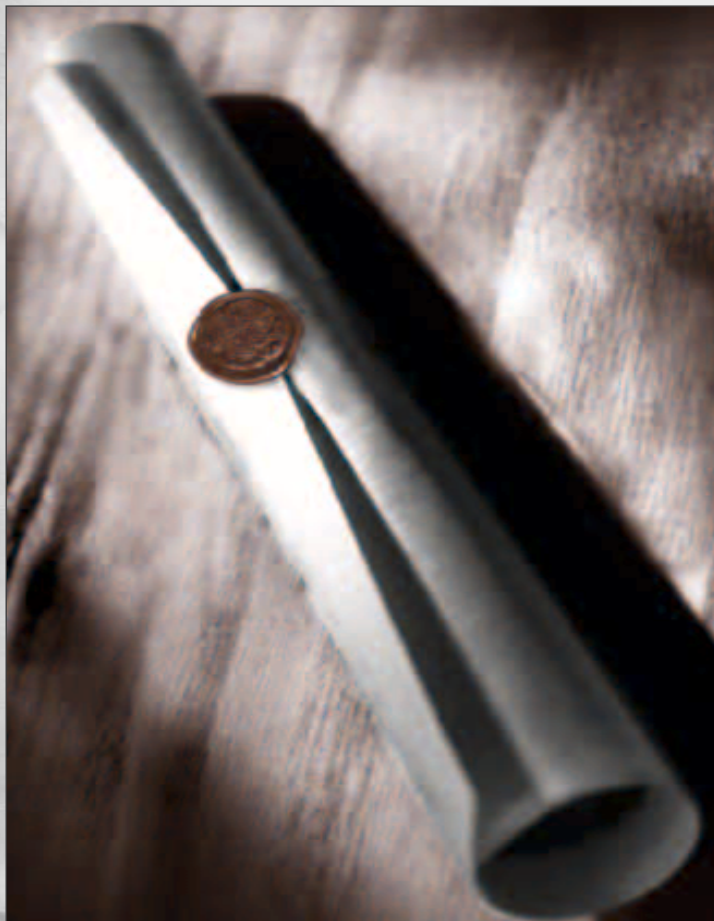
Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

september 2003

REVELATION

News for today



PATMOS, Sunday

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw – that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

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DR. ALLAN HARMAN

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Applications close 15 Sept 2003.

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editorial

Few secular historians have any real conception of a meaning behind history. They may be able to record its main personalities and events, but as for a grand scheme that explains the myriad happenings in our world – well, they’re at a loss. G.N. Clark, for example, in his inaugural address at Cambridge, said, “There is no secret and no plan to history.” For him life was an impenetrable mystery. It is otherwise when we turn to the book of Revelation. In the first century AD, as the church spread rapidly throughout the ancient world, Christians encountered bitter opposition to the Gospel. One of their desperate needs was to be able to make sense of their sufferings. How do you accommodate the murder of family and friends with belief in a God who is all-wise and powerful and who knows the end from the beginning? It is difficult to square these awkward realities with belief in a sovereign God.

This is why the book of Revelation is so important to the church. It helps Christians to see beyond the anomalies and tragedies of life so that we can get the real picture of what is happening. According to the apostle John, it is when we hear the message of the book and take it to heart that we will be blessed (Rev. 1:3). The blessing comes from seeing the “behind-the-scenes” picture, which is a vision of an omnipotent God and his Christ coming to help His people who are locked in a titanic struggle with an unbelieving world.

As a theologian, John paints a picture of God who has secured the final victory against the forces of evil and is now engaged in a mopping-up operation against constant guerilla attacks from the underworld. He shows how a new world order is slowly emerging from the chaos of a fallen earth. History has turned the corner. His task is to organise the pieces of our lives so that we can fit them into a coherent picture which will make sense of our suffering, failures, and apostasy as well as the church’s counter-attack through prayer and praise. And showing us how everything fits in a world where God is in charge is the greatest contribution of the book of Revelation.

Peter Hastie ^{ap}

An encouraging word

By symbol and sign, God teaches His victory and plan.



Dr Dennis E Johnson is professor of practical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in California. He is also an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in America. He is the author of a number of books, including *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*, *The Triumph of the Lamb – A Commentary on Revelation* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001) and *Let's Study Acts* (Banner of Truth, 2003).

AP is indebted to Daniel McManigal, a former student of Westminster in California, who caught up with Dr Johnson on a recent trip back to the USA.

Many people find Revelation difficult. What advice have you for those who can't seem to get anything out of it?

The first thing that I would say to them is don't give up hope, keep working on it. The book of Revelation is intended to reveal, not to hide or confuse. So I would say, "keep working on it". It is important to keep in mind that the full title is: The



**Dennis E. Johnson
talks to
Daniel McManigal**

Revelation of Jesus Christ. This means it is about Him. The book of Revelation reveals the Lord's victory and His preservation and protection of the church.

It is also helpful to read what other New Testament books say about the time in which we now live. Christ's first coming was the beginning of the last days. Hebrews 1 says that in the last days, God has spoken to us through His Son. 1 Corinthians 15 talks about Christ ruling, until all creatures are put under His feet. That began with His resurrection in terms of His establishment of the Kingdom of God.

Finally, look at the Old Testament passages that Revelation often refers to. If you are reading a Bible with a good set of cross-references, it should point you to those passages in the Old Testament that Revelation is commenting on.

It has been said that Revelation only makes sense in light of the Old Testament. Should John interpret Ezekiel or should Ezekiel interpret John? Or is there another way?

Any place where we are reading the New Testament in a certain sense, we read the New Testament in the light of the Old, or we ought to. God laid that foundation there in the period of promise, in prophecies, in shadows, in types and the whole historical experience of Israel to whet the appetite of His people for the coming of Christ. So the Old Testament interprets the New. But also, of course, the New Testament needs to interpret the Old because it is when Christ comes that all the Old Testament images, events and persons really come into clear focus.

Let me illustrate this by using the genre of murder mystery books. The clues in the earlier chapters are all there, so that if you are as clever as the author, you can figure out who committed the crime before you come to the last chapter. But often you can't and yet, when you see that last chapter revealed, then all the clues in the

earlier chapters fall into place.

In many places, Revelation talks in a kind of a symbolic vocabulary. God is conveying the truth through pictures.

That sometimes is a challenge because we don't know exactly how to interpret the pictures, but it also fits very well with the way that He would bring His comfort to the first century Christians, who would hear this book read aloud. The blessing at the beginning of the book of Revelation is not only for the individual who reads it in a first century congregation. Those who hear it read aloud can receive the blessing as they take these things to heart. That visual dimension of the images is effective and helpful.

But how do you interpret the visions?

Well, I think one of the crucial keys is that God in the Old Testament laid out the symbolic vocabulary that He would then use in the book of Revelation. You mentioned Ezekiel, and some of the symbols used in Revelation are first introduced in the visions of Ezekiel, especially in the early chapters. He saw God enthroned on the wheeled chariot, supported by the four living creatures. Later on in Ezekiel, these are identified as cherubim (Ezk. 10).

These Old Testament pictures are not just found in the prophetic or visionary books. They are also in the books of Genesis and Exodus – with the delivery of God's people through Moses. God put that symbolic vocabulary in the Old Testament so that we could interpret the book of Revelation correctly.

But Revelation also does some new things. Daniel sees four different beasts, which are the enemies of God's people (Daniel 7). When you get to the book of Revelation, the attributes of those four beasts are found in one beast. This beast is not just a single world kingdom anymore, it is a world power. Certainly Rome is the expression of that hostile world power in the time in which John is writing, yet it goes beyond Rome as well. So there are new things that come as God uses that vocabulary in new ways, in the light of the coming of Christ.

What is John's central message in Revelation? Does he write with a specific purpose?

John does write with a specific purpose in mind. He was given this revelation of Jesus Christ to fortify the church for the spiritual battle we confront. I sometimes think of the enemies of the church as they are symbolised later in the book of

Revelation. The two beasts, the beast from the sea, the beast from the land and the harlot are the tools of the dragon, Satan. These images symbolise the way the world brings the attack against the church. It does so primarily through intimidation, deception and seduction.

So John is given these visions in order to strengthen the church to resist such intimidation. The confidence of the church is in Jesus Christ. He will bring them into His victory and even wins the victory through their very suffering!

Christ is setting things in their true perspective in these visions. Appearances are often deceiving, but in reality Christ has the victory, therefore the church should not be led astray by false teaching. For instance the seductions of the world are represented by the harlot (Rev. 17). The seduction of compromise is given to us in a church like Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22). Laodicea thought that it was affluent, when in fact it was spiritually destitute and bankrupt. Laodicea's self-delusion is a form of Satan's attack just as much as violent persecution is.

Churches in the West don't often see that as a form of attack. When we think about the church in battle, we think about the church that is undergoing persecution by suffering, imprisonment and martyrdom. We don't realise that the seduction of affluence, the seduction of just wanting to be acceptable in a society that idolises tolerance above everything else, is also a great danger. So in all those ways we are being shown the dangers in sometimes graphic, even terrifying terms.

But ultimately we are being pointed to the victory that is in Christ. The truth of Christ sets us straight when we are tempted to buy into the deception. When we are being tempted to give up, or give in, we must remember that Christ won the victory through His suffering and resurrection.

The church is called to purity because Christ is the pure one and we are united with Him. We are called to remain pure; to keep our garments unstained is the imagery that Revelation uses. Purity comes because of the one we follow. Jesus is winning the victory through His holi-

ness as well as through the suffering He underwent on our behalf.

What does the book of Revelation teach us about God and His Lamb?

Well the Revelation certainly teaches us that God is sovereign. As much as world history may appear to be out of control, God is in control and nothing happens without His say-so. I think one of the ways that this is graphically illustrated is in chapter 5. Here we have the One on the throne handing the scroll to the Lamb. The scroll is the unfolding of the purpose of God, and the Lamb begins to open the seals in chapters six, seven and the beginning of eight. As the Lamb opens the seals, we see various types of catastrophes let loose upon the earth, especially the four horsemen of the apocalypse, as we call them.

Whether it is conquest, warfare leading to bloodshed, famine, disease, plague, whatever it might be, these things that look so out of control, are in fact in the hand of the Lamb. He exerts His authority in all of those things. But of course, ultimately, it is not just for our time. God is leading all of history to that day when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. Christ has won the victory decisively through His death and resurrection, and the day is coming when that will be evident to all. It is a message of tremendous hope and encouragement for us.

I think it is all the more hopeful and encouraging because some of the visions very graphically portray the power of the enemies arrayed against us. Revelation doesn't soft-pedal that. It doesn't minimise the dangers, but in the light of all those dangers, it emphasises that Christ is all the more powerful. So it really illustrates the point that John makes in his first epistle, "greater is He who is in you than he that is in the world" (1 Jn 4:4).

Revelation begins with God showing John "what must soon take place". Is it true then that the things in the book of Revelation have already taken place?

Well that leads to, of course, a discussion of the major schools of interpreting the book of Revelation. The preterist school would say yes. The large majority of the events in the book of Revelation have already taken place. Some would even go so far as to say that all of the events have taken place. The futurist school, on the other hand, would say that most of these things, at least from chapter

four on, have not yet taken place or are beginning to happen in our day. I think the answer lies in neither one of those extremes.

We do need to take seriously the emphasis both at the beginning of the book of Revelation and at the end. Revelation is about events and forces that would be intelligible and would touch the experience of those first-century churches to whom John wrote. That is my main problem with the futurist interpretation. It seems to separate the bulk of the book of Revelation from the forces and the factors that were taking place in the first century churches.

But preterism hasn't convinced me either, even though I think preterism is right to emphasise at the beginning what must soon take place (Rev 1:1). At the end of the book of Revelation John is told not to seal up the book (Rev. 22:10). I think it is very striking because that contrasts with the instructions to Daniel in Daniel 8 and 12. Daniel was told to seal up the book because his prophecy had to do with a different redemptive historical era. It had to do with the fulfillment that would come in Christ. So Daniel was to seal that and John was not to.

So what John sees are things that will take place, at least beginning soon after he receives these revelations. He has also observed and recorded certain things that have already been fulfilled. Certainly at least one of the fulfillments of what John is seeing is in the fall of Rome, which is the great persecutor of the Church in John's day. Rome stands in the tradition of Old Testament Babylon and Assyria. Rome has become a beast that persecutes the Church. Today as we read Revelation, Rome has fallen; but of course that doesn't mean that all human governments who are opposed to the Church have fallen and there is no more threat.

You have to take it step by step through the book of Revelation to draw valid connections between John's visions and the things that they symbolise. I think sometimes we are shown not just a particular historical event that would occur on one specific date, but a force that is constantly or repeatedly at work in the dynamic of the battle between Christ and Satan. This cosmic battle may have a number of expressions before the very end. But Revelation certainly does point us beyond the immediate experience of the early churches and points their hope and ours to the climax of this redemptive-historical epoch. In the meantime we stand, just as they stood, between the

coming of Christ and the hope of His Second Coming.

You talked a little bit about the beginning and end. Would you see Revelation as having a chronological order of events happening one after another?

I do not see Revelation as simply an unfolding order of visions symbolising a chronological order of events. I think there are clear indications that there is kind of a rewinding of the video tape and looking at it from another angle. We often call that recapitulation where we will look over the same history or the same era in history from several different perspectives. Take, for example, the end of chapter six with the breaking of the sixth seal. We read about all the stars of heaven falling to the earth like figs. Yet when we get into the trumpets, which come later, lo

Laodicea's self-delusion is a form of Satan's attack just as much as violent persecution is.



and behold, the stars are still up in the sky and only a third of them are darkened when the fourth trumpet sounds (8:12).

So, clearly to me, the sixth seal shows us really the very end of history. It shows the dissolution of the old heavens and earth. The fourth trumpet, which comes *after* the sixth seal in the order of the book, actually symbolises things that happen in history *before* the sixth seal. We will see this kind of process in a number of other places in the book of Revelation.

In a sense, when we get to the trumpets, we have rewound the film and we are looking at it from a different perspective and God is taking us through some of those same things from a different angle. You see it again in Revelation 12. The beginning of Revelation 12 starts with a heavenly woman, who is symbolic of Eve and Israel, giving birth to the Messiah. This took place before John received the Revelation because the birth, life and resurrection of Jesus had already occurred. Actually, in the second half of the book of Revelation, we are being shown the same conflict where Christ wins the decisive

battle over again. So it is not a direct chronological unfolding in terms of visions connected to the events. By the time we get to the final vision, though, we are shown the final victory of Christ over all of His enemies and the establishment of the Church without any challenge, without any further conflict, in the new heavens and the new earth. So in the end we get to the end, but in the middle we are being shown visions that recapitulate one another.

People are often alarmed by the blood and violence in the book of Revelation. For example, are the bowls of God's wrath in chapter 16 meant to induce fear in us?

As we think about the bowls in Revelation 16, which pour out the wrath of God in its fullness, at least one of its purposes is to induce fear in us. It is to show the ultimate consequences of rebellion against God.

We need to remember that the earlier churches that were addressed originally, as well as churches today who are listening to the book of Revelation, are not only tempted to be intimidated by persecution, but also tempted to be seduced by the appealing things in the world that the harlot represents. Churches are being seduced by affluence such as the Church of Laodicea, which seems to have plenty of money, but no spiritual life or sensitivity. So in one sense, God is saying again that appearances can be deceiving. The appearance of the cross is deceiving: it looks like weakness when really it is strength. The appearance of Rome in all of its majesty, in all of its luxury looks deceiving, looks appealing, but its destiny is utter destruction. So God is saying yes, fear.

I think especially for so many of us in the West, Revelation has a very strong message: God is a God of justice. We are taught so often in our culture almost to idolise tolerance: surely God couldn't be a God of wrath — no, of course not. But Revelation says God is a God of wrath and a God of justice. His holiness is consuming and we need to pay attention and take account of this biblical truth. We should not be seduced by the allure of our culture's appeal to tolerance and general relativism.

The violent scenes say there are absolutes and the day of judgment is truly coming. But they are also an encouragement because they say to the Church that is faithful, "Though you are suffering now, your tears are not forgotten." This

starts as early as the fifth seal when the Lamb breaks the seal and John sees the martyrs, as it were, like blood under the altar, crying out, "How long until you avenge our blood?" At the breaking of the seventh seal there is silence in Heaven for half an hour and the prayers of the saints on earth, who are suffering, are being offered up with incense. God has not forgotten these things. In fact, in the destruction of Babylon, God says that He has remembered Babylon. He has not forgotten all of her violence against His people. So when we suffer injustice, we can be patient and hopeful. The God who says, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," will indeed repay.

Are those in the Presbyterian and Reformed traditions guilty of ignoring the "literal-where-possible" principle when interpreting the book of Revelation?

Well, I think my first response would be that "literal" is a difficult word. Often, I think, when interpreters say they are interpreting the book of Revelation literally where possible, they tend to mean physically when possible. But I think everybody instinctively recognises that there is a lot of symbolism in the book of Revelation that could theoretically be taken physically, yet we know that is not the right way to take it.

I have heard that the beast must symbolise a human ruler because it is physically impossible that there might be a monster that emerges from the sea that receives power and rules the world. But there is nothing inherently impossible in creation that precludes this from taking place, and yet I don't know of any interpreter who takes the beast as a "literal" monster from the deep. Everybody recognises that the beast is symbolic of a world power, or perhaps an individual. Sometimes the name antichrist, from John's epistles, is attached to it, although John never uses the word antichrist in the book of Revelation to describe the beast as a human individual. But everybody recognises the beast as being symbolic. Why do we recognise that? Partly because we recognise the echoes of Daniel 7. The four beasts that Daniel sees before the vision of the victorious Son of Man are clearly identified as kings or kingdoms. So once again we have the Old Testament helping us to understand the New.

More generally, I would say that the book of Revelation itself, from the very beginning, argues for a "symbolic where possible" hermeneutic rather than a "lit-

eral where possible" hermeneutic. From the very opening verses John uses an unusual Greek word, which only appears in the book of Revelation and his Gospel, the verb *semaino*, which is related to *semeion* or "sign". Jesus gave John these visions to show him what would soon take place. Revelation begins with the vision of the Son of Man. That opening vision closes with an interpretation of the stars in the hand of the Son of Man and the lampstands among which He is walking.

But it is not just those few individual places where John, in a sense, steps out of narrative mode, or where Jesus (or an angel) speaking to John says, "This picture

means this." It is really the whole structure of the visionary genre of prophetic revelation that demands we recognise that these are symbols being used. Then we must ask ourselves, "Now, what do these symbols represent and what do they say about the things they represent?" That is where I think it is tremendously important not only to have the Old Testament background of symbolism used there, but also to have the structure of eschatology as it has been conveyed in the less symbolic parts of the New Testament like 1 Corinthians 15, for example.

What is the millennium of Revelation 20, and what are the different positions?

OK, the word millennium is a Latin word that simply means "a thousand years". So it is an appropriate substitute as a word for John's description of a thousand years period of time that he describes in two ways. It is a period in which the dragon is chained so that he can no longer deceive the nations. It is also described by John in Revelation 20:1-6 as a time in which the "beheaded martyrs" or the martyrs, we might say, are ruling on thrones "for a thousand years".

Now there are basically three views on this vision. The premillennial view interprets this passage as a rule of Christ on earth, after His Second Coming, in which believers who have been resurrected will rule over a remnant of rebellious people who have survived Christ's Second Coming. This will be for a very long period of time. Some would say it is a lit-

eral thousand years and others would say it is just symbolic of a long period of time. There will come a final battle at the end of that earthly rule of the risen Christ with His risen saints. It will be a final revolution or revolt against Christ's rule in which all of Christ's enemies will be destroyed and then the new heavens and a new earth will come in. That, roughly, is premillennialism.

The postmillennial view would say, No, Christ will not return *before* the thousand years (premillennial means before the thousand years), but Christ will return *after* (post-) the thousand-year period or whatever is symbolised by it. The postmillennial view would say fundamentally that this thousand-year period symbolises a long period, not necessarily a literal thousand years. It will be a long period in which the Gospel is advancing among the nations. Some would say this even produces tremendous societal reformation; governments are being established on the principles of the Word of God and divine justice. People will live longer and all sorts of benefits will flow from this. The nations will be largely evangelised and come to faith, but then there will be a short rebellion, and then the return of Christ. Postmillennial interpreters typically say it needs to be seen on the plane of history that Christ is victorious, and that is what will happen for a prolonged period at the end of the church age, before the return of Christ.

The amillennial view is the third view. Technically the word means "no millennium", but obviously amillennialists believe that the thousand years really are about *something*. What we are saying is that it is not a millennium in the sense that the premillennialist position or the postmillennialist position understands it. That is, although we agree with postmillennialists that Christ will return after the period of time symbolised by the "thousand years", we do not believe that Revelation promises a long period of time in which there is going to be a kind of general prosperity that is visible in every respect on an earth still populated by people infected by sin.

The "thousand years" vision of Revelation 20 is about a couple of things. First, Satan the dragon is bound. During the time of the Old Testament, only Israel was God's covenant people. Satan, by and large, kept the gentile nations in darkness, but now the Gospel is going out to all the nations. In this sense Satan, the dragon is now bound: the Gospel is bearing fruit among the Gentiles.

Revelation has a very strong message: God is a God of justice.

We see another effect of the binding of Satan at the end of the thousand years. After the dragon is loosed, we are told, he will pull a worldwide conspiracy together to try to crush "the holy city", which stands for the whole Church throughout the world. What this implies is that, between the first coming of Christ and the time just before His Second Coming, no single world power can arise that will be able to pull together a global conspiracy to eradicate the church. Since the fall of Rome, there is no one state or nation with the kind of power that Babylon enjoyed in the days of Daniel, when it had Judah in its power, or the way Rome basically had control of the whole world when John wrote. There is a lot of persecution that the church is experiencing today, but no worldwide persecution will arise until the very end. This restraint of Satan's desire to destroy the church is another theme that the thousand years is about in the amillennial position, which is my position.

The other thing to notice in Revelation 20 is that the martyrs who are ruling are ruling not on earth, but they are ruling in heaven. This is part of that paradox that we talked about earlier in connection with Revelation 12:11. The martyrs have conquered already. They are ruling and the word of their testimony is still bearing fruit in the life of the church on the earth. So we are seeing a heavenly rule of the saints, and in Revelation 20:4 the description of the thrones before those who sit on them is an echo of Daniel 7, where Daniel first sees thrones, and then the Ancient of

Days and His court seated on the thrones. So it is clearly a heavenly scene and now they belong to God's heavenly court. They rule with Christ for an extensive period of time before an intensive period of persecution breaks out at the very end. Then comes the return of Christ and the new heavens and new earth.

So you don't think the apostle John was a Premillennialist?

I don't think he is a premillennialist. One of the big problems with the premillennial understanding of Revelation 20 is that by the time you get to the end of

It teaches us that even though persecution is intense, God is still restraining the enemy of the church.



Revelation 19, the Lamb and His army appear and they have destroyed everybody else. The armies who have followed the beast include not just military people but all unbelievers, slave and free, small and great, are all destroyed. Everybody is killed, and the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire.

You see, if the time period that Revelation 20 symbolises must follow


Revelation 19, there is really no point in binding the dragon because there is no one left to be deceived. So what we have in Revelation 20 is a recapitulation again, it is going back and portraying this whole age in which we live that leads to another description of the last battle in Revelation 20:7-10. That description of the battle against "Gog and Magog" is really just another view of the same battle described at the end of Revelation 19.

Is the purpose of chapter 20 really to teach us about the millennium?

Well, the purpose of chapter 20 is not to teach us about an earthly millennium, such as the premillennialist view believes. Really the purpose was to encourage the first century church and the Church in our day as well. It teaches us that even though persecution is intense, God is still restraining the enemy of the church. God is still causing the church's witness to bear good fruit even when it means martyrdom for the saints. So it is a word of encouragement. It is not to give us an advance preview of some other age that is going to come at some point in the future. It is to give us a perspective on our own age.

What hope and comfort can the church gain from the book of Revelation, and what does Christ's Church have to look forward to?

Well, the great comfort is not just that Christ will defeat all of His and our enemies, for He has already done that decisively at the cross and resurrection, and He will utterly destroy them at His Second Coming. Our great comfort comes in the beautiful picture of Revelation 21 and 22 where the Church is the glorified Bride and City of God. The picture of the City of the Heavenly Jerusalem is not just a place that we are going to live in, it is really who we are that is portrayed in this beautiful form. So the light, the luminous dimensions of it, the purity of it, the joy and of course the promises fulfilled, will be as His servants serve Him. They will see His face and they will be in the presence of God for all eternity. It is Paradise regained, but a lot better. It is not just the Garden of Eden restored, although there are echoes of the Garden of Eden with the tree of life and so on for the healing of the nations, but it is more than that. It is better, it is the City in which the whole people of God reflect the radiance of God and of the Lamb and glorify and enjoy Him forever.

Daniel McManigal is a chaplain at Presbyterian Aged Care, Sydney. 

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Song, glorious song

Music, the food of heavenly love, is our destiny – now and forever.

Have you ever stopped to ask yourself: “What will I be doing in the new heavens and earth?” This may come as a terrible shock to rugby fans but I have found no mention in the Bible that rugby is the game they play in heaven. Melburnians will be glad! Nor indeed is the age to come portrayed as a gigantic Westfield shopping mall where all our physical and sensual pleasures can be indulged on unlimited credit!

Instead, the book of Revelation tells us that we will reach complete fulfillment – not playing sport or indulging ourselves – but largely through the adoration of God. Of course, we will engage in other activities, such as fellowship and service. Nevertheless, the Apostle John tells us that one of the main characteristics of the age to come is that we will experience such a heightened and intensified vision of God’s glory that we will be lost in wonder, love and praise. If you want to describe life in the new age, it’s easy. It consists, among other things, of unending praise and song.

That’s why it’s important that we take stock of what lies before us in the future. It would be tragic, to put it mildly, to devote our lives here and now to activities which will be utterly useless to us in the age to come. That’s why we need to keep our eye on the future so that we allow it to shape our present life together.

Actually, and this may come as a surprise for some, even preaching and evangelism will cease in the new age. Their functions in establishing us in Christ will be complete and will give way to unceasing praise and service. That’s why we need to think seriously about our calling as a church to worship God through song.

One of the things that impressed the Apostle John is that singing is one of the activities of heaven. Singing is to be part of our destiny. We find more songs in the book of Revelation than any other book in the Bible, with the exception, of course, of the Psalter. In fact there are 14 of them. These songs are sung by various groups: the angels, the elders around the throne, the four living creatures and the redeemed. The heavenly realms will resound with inspirational and spine-tin-



Peter Hastie

gling music.

Do you find that strange – even unnerving? It shouldn’t be. In fact, it is meant to be something that we are meant to be thinking about very seriously. For instance, even now the apostle Paul tells us to “teach and admonish one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” (Col. 3:16). Further, the Psalmist says “sing joyfully to the Lord; it is fitting for

Singing is a mark of the church on earth. But it will be even more of a mark of the church in heaven.

the upright to praise Him” (Ps. 33:1-3). Singing is a mark of the church on earth. But it will be even more of a mark of the church in heaven. Why?

I think the reason is that then we shall have perfect knowledge of God. “We shall see His face” (Rev. 22:3). In that sense we are not like Moses, Samson’s parents or Isaiah who dreaded, as sinners, to look directly upon God (Ex. 33:20; Judg. 13:22; Is. 6:5). In heaven grace will have done its purifying work in our lives and we will be perfected in holiness. We will be able to gaze without fear upon the beauty of God’s holiness.

Here on earth there are some visions

that are so captivating that we cannot tear our eyes away. I can remember sitting on a glacier in the Canadian Rockies drinking in the sheer beauty and panorama of Lake Louise and not wanting to turn aside. I can scarcely begin to imagine what it will be like to see God face to face and look upon the Author of such magnificent splendours. It should not surprise us, therefore, that we’ll be more inclined to give expression to praise and delight. Our vision will be complete and unclouded by sin.

Again, I think music and singing has a major role in our future life because God has specially designed melody, harmony and rhythm to enhance the meaning of the words we sing. One of the important functions of music is to help words carry their meaning more effectively. Just think of some of the advertising jingles that have become Australian national treasures – the Vegemite, Aeroplane Jelly and Mortein songs – and you’ll see how a catchy tune can drive a message home to the heart.

In the same way, the music of heaven will help to infuse God’s Word into the very depths of our souls so that we will want to shout for joy. In this sense, the music of heaven serves a different purpose from the normal uses of music in contemporary culture. For us, music is often thought of as “entertainment” or “art for art’s sake”. But for God it’s the medium into which He puts His most important statements. Is it any accident that when God wants to say something in a “Now hear this!” voice, He puts it into a poetic

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or lyrical form which can be readily accompanied by music?

It may come as a surprise that Christianity is not just a matter of believing the truth. Truth, when we properly receive it, affects our bodies and emotions. If you believe the Gospel with sincere faith, then that belief will assert itself with singing. The Gospel always reveals its presence in our hearts through our voices.

The voice, of course, is God's greatest gift. From an anatomical and functional point of view, it can serve as a musical instrument. No other creature has received it. It can perform extraordinary tasks, but the greatest one of all is to sing praise to our Creator, Redeemer and Judge (Rev. 4:11; 5:9,10; 19:1,2). We completely corrupt it as a gift when we use it for profanity or to harm others through evil speech. However, it reaches its greatest usefulness in the service of God, especially singing.

Thus the book of Revelation, being a picture of the triumph of God and His Christ, resounds with song. Indeed, Christ's victory is so overwhelming and glorious and the privileges He bestows so great that a new song is called for (Rev. 5:9; 14:3) Why? Because only when the Divine Artist completes the picture of redemption that He has been painting for thousands of years will we see the breath-taking wonder of all His accomplishments. We will see how Christ has ventured into enemy territory, routed the opposition, secured the release of all His prisoners and brought each one safely home. No one is missing in action. Such an amazing triumph calls for special victory songs.

Music is not simply important because

we find it a moving and helpful aid to remember things. It is also honouring to God. God delights in music and song. He is the ultimate composer of the Bible's songs and the wisdom they contain (Deut. 31:19; 1 Kings 4:29,32). Indeed, the ultimate reason why we should sing is that God Himself sings (Zeph. 3:17): "He will rejoice over you with singing."

Again, the writer to the Hebrews reminds us that Jesus delights to sing (Heb. 2:12). There he reminds us of Jesus' attitude to sacred song, "I will declare your name to my brothers, in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." Further, Paul says that Christ sings as a testimony to the Gentiles (Rom. 15:9). In each of these texts we discover that God is a person who delights in singing.

Given the emphasis on singing in the book of Revelation, we might expect to find some signs of musical accompaniment. We are certainly not disappointed. Fanfares of trumpets announce the moments of coming judgment and redemption, and there are repeated references to harps. In view of this, I find it hard to see what possible objection some Christians have to the use of musical instruments as a form of accompaniment. After all, the human voice is a cross between a wind and string instrument,

and God commands us to use it. He also says that His heart laments like a flute (Jer. 48:36), so presumably He has no objection to that instrument either. Christian musicians have a mandate from the book of Revelation to devote themselves to high musical attainments in the service of God.

However, it is not enough simply to sing. It depends what you sing. The characteristic of the songs of Heaven (Rev. 5:12-13) is that they focus our thoughts upon God and away from man. These songs dwell on the greatness of God and what He has done. There is no mention of apostles or prophets or any of the achievements of Bible heroes. Unfortunately one of the modern trends in Christian music is away from God-centredness. Ours is a self-absorbed age which is completely man-centred. We are always thinking about ourselves. However, in worship the focus is meant to be upon God.

Finally, we should notice that God uses song to powerfully change us. We ought to be impressed that in Revelation 5, 8 and 14 those who sang "fell down and worshipped the Lamb". This reminds us that we can't praise or glorify God without being changed in the process. As Archbishop William Temple put it: "To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God and to devote the will to the purpose of God." As such, God-centred singing is one of the things we need most of all.

Peter Hastie is issues editor of AP.

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True reality

The Matrix had it a bit right, Revelation has it all right.

The world as we know it is not the truth; it is simply “the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you to the truth.” So says Morpheus to Neo in the movie *The Matrix*.

The concept behind *The Matrix* is that the world of regular experience is nothing more than a complex computer simulation. Morpheus offers Neo a choice of two pills. The red pill will take him to true reality – outside the simulation. The blue pill will take him no further, and he will remain as someone who believes what he wants to believe.

The Book of Revelation is Jesus’ “red pill” for His church.

He offers us the choice of experiencing “true reality” – a world where God rules demonstrably, a world of spiritual warfare, where Satan is active, and seeks to bring down God’s people and God’s purposes. Reality is a world where the saints, rather than being passive victims, are victorious warriors with the message of life, fighting against their glorious King Jesus.

Revelation is Jesus’ wake-up call to comfortable Christians who have swallowed the blue pill. For them, life isn’t scary, or spiritual. Satan is a toothless tiger. God’s people are passengers, happily cruising along, staying out of trouble, waiting for heaven. God’s purposes are no bigger than keeping His people well fed, warm, and dry, and occasionally finding them a parking spot at the supermarket.

Revelation is Jesus’ comfort to persecuted Christians. Satan is trying to bring them down. But they are not without hope. God is on the throne, and has won the victory in His Son. Those who persevere in holiness and witness will win the crown!

There is perhaps no more relevant and important message for the church today.

And yet for most people, Revelation is a mystery. They think, “Why bother with Revelation? All those numbers, and weird animals. I can’t make head or tail of it. It’s all just too confusing!”

In recent times the books of “millennial experts” have filled Christian bookshops. Their bewildering timelines and latter-day signs have scared off most



**David
Balzer**

Christians who feel incapable of deciphering the book’s intricacies. (This includes most ministers, who might preach on the letters to the seven churches, or perhaps the throne-room scene of Chapter 4, but who come to a screeching halt at the end of chapter 5!)

The temptation in reading Revelation is that the staggering array of images and numbers encourages us to concentrate on the fine detail. (What does the third crown on the head of the beast represent?)

However, to read Revelation this way is to make a mistake – you risk losing sight of the forest for the trees. At times such a fine-detail analysis is necessary. But I believe more can be gained by a “high-altitude fly-over” than a painstaking tree-by-tree search.

This approach would have seemed obvious to the original audience – first century Christians, sitting together in church on the Lord’s Day, hearing the work read aloud from start to finish.

John exhorts such a gathering–

***Revelation is
Jesus’ comfort
to persecuted
Christians.
They are not
without hope.***

“Blessed is the one who reads (aloud) the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it” (1:3). This means that hearers can understand the message of the book with sufficient clarity to receive the comfort, encouragement, and correction which God intends for them.

By reading the whole book, without getting bogged down in details (it takes less than an hour) the great images and pictures that John has painted wash over us.

The big themes they represent explode like fireworks in our brains – themes like God’s sovereignty, His complete victory over sin through Jesus despite present appearances, the Church’s present privilege and responsibility, together with her glorious future hope.

These themes fill our imagination, stretch our vision, break our pride, embolden our witness, and empower our endurance and obedience.

Part of our problem is that we forget the book is designed to *reveal*, not to confuse. It’s right there in its name – Revelation. Within the first verse, it is described as a revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to show what must soon take place. He made it known by sending His angel.

He didn’t give it to confuse, divide, frustrate or terrify His people, but rather to reveal true reality.

The way God chooses to show us true reality is by using images and symbols. Revelation is a picture book! John testifies to everything he saw (1:2) – the verb is used 52 times.

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Images and symbols are necessary because, in true reality, things are not what they seem. The church in Smyrna appears poor but is rich (2:9). Laodicea thinks itself rich and self-sufficient, but it's really destitute and naked (3:17). The beast seems invincible, able to conquer the saints by slaying them (11:7; 13:7); but it is their faithful witness even to death that proves to be their victory over the dragon and the beast (12:11).

Symbols show things for what they are, with a vividness that could not be matched by a mere conceptual description. Often a picture is worth a thousand words. The great city is a harlot luxuriously dressed (17:18). The seven churches are seven lampstands (1:20). Satan is the dragon-serpent (20:2).

The obvious problem with symbols is that they can be misunderstood. We must work out the precise point of comparison between two things that are dissimilar in many other respects.

For example, John hears the promise that the Lion of Judah is worthy (5:5). But he sees the Lamb who had been slain (5:6). Jesus is like a lion *and* a slain lamb.

John hears the roll call of God's people – 144,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel (7:4), but sees a great multitude from every nation beyond counting (7:9). God's people are both an army of perfect size and symmetry, and a huge worldwide worshipping community.

A helpful rule of thumb, wherever pos-

sible, is to take what John sees as symbolic. For example the great city, which persecutes and kills Christians (11:8) is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt and Jerusalem – all at the same time.

While the images seem foreign to us, they are not pulled out of the air – nearly all are found in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. Revelation itself is a

Perhaps the best way to understand Revelation better is to read the Old Testament prophets.

prophecy (1:3), and John saw himself as standing at the end of the line of Biblical prophets (10:8-11) – with Revelation as “the climax of prophecy” as Richard Bauckham aptly describes it.

Perhaps the best way to understand Revelation better is to read the Old Testament prophets.

For example, the church in Revelation 11 is described as two witnesses – representing true testimony (Deut. 17:6), and is symbolised as two olive trees, and two lampstands. Zechariah 4 refers to two olive trees and a lampstand, probably referring to Joshua the priest and Zerubbabel the Davidic descendant. They are called, as anointed ones, to “serve the Lord in all the earth” (Zech 4:1).

Another mistake people make is to see Revelation as a time-line of events we can tick-off before Jesus returns. This would mean it was irrelevant to the seven churches, and has been to every other generation since.


Revelation is a historical document, written to real churches, undergoing real persecution from the Roman Empire. It concerned events which “must soon take place” (1:1) for them.

Likewise, it also concerns events that must soon take place for us. The enemies of God's people are still around today. They are still blinded by the same lies. Satan is still behind them. The names and faces might have changed, but the enemy is still the same.

And the task for us is still the same – to overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony, and to love not our lives so much as to shrink from death (12:11).


Go ahead. Take the red pill. Experience true reality. Are you game?

Grab a cup of coffee, find a quiet spot, and read it right now. As Vern Poythress, in his great book *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation*, encourages us: “Become engrossed in the overall story. Praise the Lord. Cheer for the saints. Detest the beast. Long for the final victory.”

David Balzer is the minister of Blacktown Presbyterian Church. 

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Headlines for today



**20 daily bible studies
on Revelation 1:1-8:5**

If all we had to go on was the evidence of what is happening around us today it might be easy to come to the conclusion that if there is a God in heaven He is either not interested in what's going on or His plan for His world has been derailed by adverse powerful forces. Terrorism is getting out of hand and the Church is either being severely persecuted or it has become weak – the product of society instead of its salt and light.

Perhaps not surprisingly, this is the way things had become by the end of the first century. True believers were becoming discouraged about whether the promises Jesus had given to His Church could be relied on – whether He really was the Saviour-Messiah-King He had claimed to be, or whether the movement He had started was just going to fizzle out like many others had done.

In this situation Jesus, from His throne in heaven, gave the Apostle John a vision. He showed John clearly that things are not what they seem, that everything that is happening is exactly within God's plan and is heading inexorably towards its intended goal.

This is just as relevant and true for us today. Jesus IS Lord!

Bruce Christian

DAY 1

Mystery uncovered

THE PASSAGE

REVELATION 1:1-3

THE POINT God does not keep us, His servants, in the dark about what He is doing in His world. The 'uncovering of the mystery' (revelation) through Jesus, the angel (messenger), and John (Jesus' disciple and apostle) is therefore part of God's self-revelation in Scripture. As such it is urgent and prophetic. Blessing will come from reading it out, from hearing it read, and from 'keeping' what it says.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus Christ is the subject, object and means of all God does in His world; He is both the message and the messenger (cf John 12:49f).
- The 'revelation' was 'signified' (NIV 'made known') – ie given in distinct signs and symbols – through God's messenger (angel).
- John could vouch for its authenticity because of His own clear experience, because it came to him as God's word, and because it had come personally through Jesus Christ whom he knew.
- There is blessing to be had this month as we read it together!
- There was urgency in the message because of events to follow.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Does John anticipate that the readers of this revelation will treat it as mysterious or as clear and profitable teaching from God? Why are Christians today inclined to shy away from it?

DAY 2

The A to Z of God

THE PASSAGE

REVELATION 1:4-8

THE POINT There is only one true God. He is eternal: past, present and future. Everything from A to Z is His. His Son, Jesus Christ (Messiah), is central, and essential, to everything God is and does.

THE PARTICULARS

- John's use of 'seven' is symbolic of perfection. He is writing to 7 specific churches (with some special connection to him?) but His message is to the whole Church. The 7 spirits could be a reference to angels or to the Holy Spirit (cf His 7 facets in Is. 11:2).
- Jesus Christ, to whom eternal power and glory belong, is the key to God's self-revelation: He is the faithful witness; He conquered death and rose again, confirming our resurrection hope; He rules over all earthly authorities; His blood (shed as a sacrifice for us) has set us free from the power of our sins and has given us a new place in His Father's Kingdom; He is coming again for all to face, including those who crucified Him; everyone will then acknowledge having had a part in His death and will mourn.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How important is Jesus to our understanding of who God is and how He operates in human history? What does this tell us about other religions (or versions of 'Christianity') that do not have Jesus at the centre as God the Son who died for sinners?

DAY 3 *Jesus, stand among us...*

THE PASSAGE REVELATION 1:9-16

THE POINT God wants us to be reassured that, in the midst of its suffering and trials, the whole Church, in every place and at every time, is indwelt by the risen and reigning Son of Man, the Lord Jesus.

THE PARTICULARS

- The command for John to write down what he saw came from a very immediate and deliberate experience of the Holy Spirit. The trumpet signifies God making a public announcement to mankind.
- This is the only reference in Scripture to the 1st day of the week as 'the Lord's Day' although it was clearly treated as a special day by the Early Church (cf John 20:19, Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:2).
- The 7 specific churches in Asia Minor (now Turkey) signify the whole Church throughout time and space, represented as being in God's continual presence by the golden lampstands.
- The symbolism of the vision of Jesus in all His reigning glory is both comforting and terrifying: those who are His look forward to His coming; those who are not will shrink in fear before Him.
- The 'stars' are the angelic emissaries to the churches (see v. 20).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• See Daniel 7:9-14 for the background to the 'son of man' image. Which aspects are comforting and which are terrifying? Why?

DAY 4 *Do not be afraid*

THE PASSAGE REVELATION 1:17-20

THE POINT This vision was given to John by Jesus for the enlightenment and comfort of the whole Church. Basic to this is the fact that Jesus himself is God: Jesus, who came to earth as a man, who lived among us, who died on the cross, who rose again from the dead, and who now reigns in heaven, is none other than God eternal, holding the Church in His hand, with power over death and hell!

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus was there at the beginning (cf John 1:1f) and He will be there at the end (cf Matt. 28:20) – we need not fear, His hand is on us.
- Isaiah 44:6 uses the title 'the First and the Last' for the LORD (Jehovah God); here Jesus takes the same title for himself! (Next time a Jehovah's Witness comes around ask him to explain this.)
- John was commanded by Jesus to write down the whole vision so that the Church would see that God does control all history, and that He is bringing it to a predetermined end for our benefit.
- Jesus is always present with His Church: we are special to Him.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• What special comfort is it to you to know that Jesus is the keeper of the keys of death and hell? (see John 10:28-29) What does it teach you about your own salvation and sovereign grace?

DAY 5 *When love goes off the boil*

THE PASSAGE REVELATION 2:1-7

THE POINT The specific messages to the 7 churches come from One who is intimately involved with them and vitally concerned for their welfare; He takes their commitment to His ways very seriously.

THE PARTICULARS

- The positive aspects of church life at Ephesus:
 - strenuous labour and patient, persevering steadfastness;
 - spiritual discernment and intolerance of false teachers/heretics;
 - putting up with affliction for the sake of Christ's honour.
- The negative aspects of church life at Ephesus:
 - a cooling off from the peak of their initial enthusiasm.
- The action needed:
 - real repentance leading to the rekindling of their first love.
- Jesus stresses that failure to repent will lead to their final rejection as a church; but overcoming would reinstate them fully.
- The Nicolaitans infiltrated the Church with evil practices that the Lord hated because they were contrary to His Word.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• What action do you (your Church) need to take in the light of this passage? Have we become tired and lost our first love?

DAY 6 *The Church under attack*

THE PASSAGE REVELATION 2:8-11

THE POINT When the Church is facing intense persecution, even to the point of death, it is comforting to know that the risen Lord has already conquered death. The end of our earthly pilgrimage is the time for receiving the crown (victor's wreath) of (eternal) life.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus is the Lord of all history from beginning to end. Ancient Smyrna had been destroyed and raised up again: by His own resurrection Jesus is the source of new life to believers.
- For Jews to persist in their opposition to their Messiah and His followers is a sign that they are no longer God's chosen people, but rather belong to the synagogue of Satan (cf John 8:42-44).
- Extreme poverty in this world can be a sign of heavenly riches.
- The devil can do his worst to God's people but his power, complete from a human perspective, is finite and limited by God's unchangeable plan. The '10 days' is symbolic of this reality.
- Escape from the second death (see 20:6,14; 21:8) is eternal life.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• Are you easily discouraged by opposition if you try to make a stand for Christ? How does this passage help you to persevere in your faith? Pray for Christians under intense persecution.

DAY 7 *The Church in the world*

THE PASSAGE REVELATION 2:12-17

THE POINT Christians are often required to live and witness in places that are especially under the power of the Evil One through the influence of false religion (eg Islam) or of ungodly living (eg sexual immorality/perversion or officially sanctioned corruption). Pergamum was noted for emperor-worship and heathen temples. This made Christian witness often a matter of martyrdom, as in the case of Antipas. But the reigning Christ knows all about it and is able to counter opposing beliefs with the piercing power of His Word and to protect believers with a supply of spiritual sustenance and a new passport to heaven unknown to outsiders.

THE PARTICULARS

- God's Word is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword (see Hebrews 4:12), powerful to conquer all opponents.
- We are especially required to stand firm in our society that has largely rejected God's truth and has succumbed to Satan's lies.
- If the Church has failed to stand against error it must repent.
- If we stand firm our heavenly citizenship is guaranteed.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• How is the Church today in danger of compromising under the increasing pressure of worldly values? What must we do?

DAY 8 *A wolf in sheep's clothing?*

THE PASSAGE REVELATION 2:18-29

THE POINT The big problem for the Church in Thyatira was the influence of a wicked woman (code name: Jezebel) who, while claiming to be God's spokesman, was leading many astray by advocating worldly, sensual ideas that led ultimately to gross immorality. Her most dangerous aspect was that she was among them as a professing believer who had some credibility (cf 2 Cor. 11:13f). Jesus required that she and her followers be dealt with severely.

THE PARTICULARS

- The influence of the 'Jezebel' figure (see 1 Kings 18-21) in the Church in Thyatira led Jesus to introduce himself with the full force of His majesty ('Son of God' used only here in Revelation).
- In spite of their many good points (growing in love, faith, service, perseverance), too many of them were being influenced into compromise with the world's ungodly ideas and ways.
- Nothing escapes the One 'whose eyes are like blazing fire'.
- While allowing adequate time for repentance, Jesus' ultimate intolerance of worldliness in His Church is uncompromising.
- All who persevere and overcome will reign with Jesus.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• Are we diligent enough today to avoid the 'Jezebel' syndrome?



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Rev. Moses Hahn (02) 9713 2939.

ANNANDALE
Hunter Baillie, Johnston & Collins Sts.
10.00am, 6.30pm. 2nd & 4th Sunday.
I.M. Rev. A. Van Ash (02) 9817 0587.
Welsh Church: Chalmers St, Surry Hills.
3.00pm. each Sunday.

ARMIDALE (St. Paul's)
Faulkner St, 9.30am. & 7.00pm.
I.M. Rev. Lyle Sims (02) 6777 2539

ASHFIELD
Liverpool Rd. & Knox St. 10.15am & 6.00pm
Rev Peter Hastie (02) 9798 6572.

BEACON HILL-NARRAWEENA
244 Warringah Rd. 9.30am. & 7.00pm.
Rev. Trevor Cheetham (02) 9521 2361.

BEECROFT
Mary St., 8.45am. 10.30am. & 6.30pm.
Rev Martin Levine (02) 9876 2478.

BEGA — EDEN
Bega -Upper St; Eden — CWA Rooms,
Imlay St. Clerk: Mrs J Gill (02) 6495 6062

BLACKTOWN (EAST)
Gallop Grv. & Heffron Rd. Lalor Park,
Service Times: 10.30am. & 6.00pm.
S.Clerk: Mr B. Clark (02) 9624 5027.

Bondi
Cnr. Castlefield & Miller Sts.
10.00am & 7.00pm.
Rev John Graham: (02) 9597 5214

BONNYRIGG
Western Regions Chinese Church
14-16 Bibbys Place. 9.30 am. (English) &
11.00 am. (Mandarin)
S.Clerk: Stanley Chen (02) 9753 2073
BOWRAL — MITTAGONG
Bowral: 20 Bendooley St. 10.30am.
Kid's Church: 9.30 am. 1st & 3rd Sunday
Mittagong: Cr Alice & Edwards Sts. 9.00am.
Rev. Doug McPherson: (02) 4872 4052.

BURWOOD
46-48 Belmore St. 9.15am (English)
Rev. David Maher (02) 9745 3935
11.00 am (Cantonese)
Rev. Dennis Law (02) 9715 3889
5.00 pm (English).
Rev Eugene Hor (02) 9715 3889.

CAMPBELLTOWN
34 Lithgow St. 8.30 am. 10.00 am. 6.30 pm.

CARINGBAH
393 Port Hacking Rd.
Rev Graham Flick (02) 9524 6406 (O).

CHATSWOOD
St Andrew's, Anderson St.
9.00am.& 7.00 pm.
Lane Cove, St James, Farran St. 11.00am.
Rev. Jeff Read (02) 9419 5932 (W) 2077 (H)

CHERRYBROOK
John Purchase Public School Hall, Purchase
Road, Cherrybrook 9.30 am
Rev John Irvin (Minister) (02) 9875 4894

CHINESE CHURCH
Cnr Crown & Albion Sts. Surry Hills.
English/Cantonese/Mandarin/Bilingual
Services. Office (02) 9331 4459.
Rev Joe Mock (02) 9642 8861(H).
Rev Daniel Ng (02) 9797 2342(H).
Rev Ezra Tseng (02) 9500 1259(H).

COFFS HARBOUR (St Andrew's)
187 High St. 8.00am. 9.45am. & 6.30pm.
Rev Peter Moore (02) 6652 3183(O).

CONCORD
Cornerstone Presbyterian Community Church
Meets Concord Public School 9.30 am.
Cnr Burwood Rd. & Stanley St. Concord
Rev. C S Tang (02) 9688 7880 (H)

COOTAMUNDRA (Scots)
Cnr Parker & Francis Sts 11.00 am.
I.M. Rev F. Monckton (02) 6977 1642

COWRA
46 Macquarie St. Also Gooloogong,
Morongla. Ph (02) 6342 1467.

CRONULLA
13 Croydon St. 9.30am.
Rev. Russell Stark (02) 9523 5875.

EAST MAITLAND
George St. **Beresfield:** Beresford Ave.
Raymond Terrace: Irrawang St.
I.M. Rev. David J Campbell (02) 4943 0284.

EPPING
Brigde & Rawson Sts.

Rev David Tsai (02) 9876 1188.
FORSTER/TUNCURRY
Bruce St. Forster, 9.30am.
Rev. John Thompson (02) 6552 1082

GILGANDRA (St Stephens)
14 Myrtle St. 11.00am. & 9.00am. (4th Sun).
Rev. Tony Adams (02) 6847 2036

GOSFORD
14-16 Young St. West Gosford. 8.00am.
9.45am. 6.30 pm. Office: Ph (02) 4323 2490.

GRIFFITH
Opp. Collina Oval, Blumer Ave. 9.30 am.
Rev. Peter Gobbo (02) 6962 4827.
Dr L. Thorpe (02) 6962 1934

GUNNEDAH
Marquis & Barber Sts. **Boggabri:** Court
House (02) 6742 0551

HURSTVILLE
Cnr. Park Rd. & McMahan St. English:
9.30am. & 6.30pm. Indonesian: 4.00pm.
Rev Kevin Murray (02) 9153 8176.

KIAMA
Terralong St. 9.00am & 5.30pm.
Pastor: Noel Creighton (02) 4233 1554

KOGARAH
Cnr Kensington & Derby Sts.
9.30am. & 7.00pm. (02) 9587 5577.

KOREAN, SYDNEY (Young Nak)
7-9 Manson St, Telopea. 9.30am. 11.00am.
3.00pm. S.Clerk (02) 9816 3807

LEETON
Cnr. Sycamore & Cypress Sts. 10.00 am.
Rev. Richard Keith (02) 4272 9407

LISMORE (St Paul's)
188 Keen St. 9.00 am. & 7.00 pm.
Rev Peter Playsted (02) 6624 7050

MACQUARIE
Herring & Abuklea Rds, Marsfield
Rev. Rex Swavley (02) 9878 4202

MANLY (St Andrew's)
Raglan St. & Augusta Lane. 9.45am.
Quarterly (Communion) 5.30pm.
Rev. Derek Bullen (02) 9976 2801

MAROUBRA, Kingsford
8 Robey St, **Maroubra.** 9.30 am. 7.15 pm.
94 Houston Rd, **Kingsford** 11.15am
Chinese Service, **Maroubra** 4 pm.
Rev Johnnie Li (02) 9349 1312

MOREE (St Andrew's)
Cnr Albert & Auburn Sts, 10.00am.
Rev. L. Fowler (02) 6752 1083

MOSMAN (Scots Kirk)
Belmont Rd. (nr Military Rd), 9.00am.
Rev R J McCracken (02) 9969 6101.

MOSS VALE (St Andrew's)
Browley St., 10.30am. Kids Club: 5pm,
1st & 3rd Sunday (School Term Only).
S.Clerk: Mrs Flora Walker (02) 4883 6557.

NEWCASTLE (St Andrews)
Cnr. Laman & Auckland Sts 9.15am & 7.00pm.
Office: (02) 4929 2857

NORTH SYDNEY-GREENWICH
(St Peter's) 234 Blues Point Rd. 10.00am.
& 6.45pm. Wednesday 1.15pm.
Greenwich: (Taylor's Memorial)
86A Greenwich Rd. 10.00am.
Rev Dr Paul Logan (02) 9955 1662.

ORANGE (St James)
Cnr Anson St. & Matthews Ave. 10.00am.
Rev. William Stewart (02) 6362 6304

PARRAMATTA CITY
Cumberland High School, Dunmore Ave.
Carlingford. Rev. Luke Tattersall.
S. Clerk: Mike Whiteman (02) 9484 1240.

PENRITH (St Andrew's)
Doonmore St. near High St, 9.00am. &
7.00pm. Rev William Morrow (02) 4721 2440.

PORT MACQUARIE (St Andrew's)
Cnr William/Munster Sts, 9.00am., 10.30am
Rev S Donnellan (02) 6582 2505

RANDWICK
Alison Rd. & Cook St. 10.00am. & 5.00pm.
Rev. Grant Thorpe (02) 9399 3183.

ROSE BAY (St Andrew's)
Cnr Dover Rd. & Carlisle St.
10.00am & 6.00pm.
Rev Bruce Christian (02) 9388 1206(O).

SOUTHERN CROSS
Park Ave. East Lismore
Rev. Stephen Cree (02) 6621 3655

SPRINGWOOD
160 Macquarie Rd. 10.30am. & 6.00pm.
Winmalee : 481 Hawkesbury Rd. 9.00am.
(02) 4751 1188(O).
Rev. Robert Benn (02) 4751 9968

STRATHFIELD (St David's)
Barker Rd. & Marion St. 10.00am. & 6.30pm.
Rev Robert McKean (02) 9746 8123.

SUTHERLAND
Cnr Flora & Glencoe Sts. 9.30am & 5.30pm
Rev Andrew Clausen (02) 9521 2361

SYDNEY (Scots Church)
St Patrick's Hall, 20 Grosvenor St. (tempo-
rary). Service Time: 10.30 am.
Rev. Adrian Van Ash (02) 9817 0587.

TAMWORTH (St Stephen's)
Cnr Matthews & Crown St. 9.30am &
6.30pm. **Moonbi** 9.00am.
Rev Stuart Andrews (02) 6765 8754.

Tamworth Community Presb Church,
Oxley High School Piper St Nth T'worth
10 am. Rev Keith Walker (02) 6762 5759

Manilla: Court St.
Rev. Vic Johnson (02) 6785 1627.

TAREE
Albert St. 9.00am.
Rev John Thompson (02) 6552 1082(O).

TENTERFIELD
117 Logan St. (07) 6977 1642

TERRIGAL (Scots Kirk)
2 Willoughby Rd. S. Clerk (02) 4384 3018.
I.M. Rev. R. Boase (02) 4333 9009

WAHROONGA
Wahroonga Presbyterian Church,
Cnr. Illoura Ave. & Stuart St. 9.30am.
Rev. Murray Fraser (02) 9489 3690

WAGGA WAGGA SOUTH
60-62 Coleman St. Turvey Park

9.00am & 10.30am.
Rev. Sandy McMillan (02) 6925 1228.

WEE WAA
Mitchell St. Rev. Mark Powell (02) 6795 4259

WENTWORTH FALLS (St Andrew's)
Falls Rd. 9.00 am. Session Clerk: Mr Bernie
Tucker (02) 4757 3518

WENTWORTHVILLE
7 McKem St. 9.45am & 6.00pm.
Girraween: 15 Tungarra Rd. 8.15am.
Ghana Congregation (Girraween) 10.30am.
Rev. David Griffin Phone: (02) 9896 3297.

WESTLAKES
Warnervale Community Hall, Warnervale Rd
S.School 8.30 am. Service 9.30 am.
Rev. Esa Hukkinen (02) 4393 5530

WEST WYALONG
Pioneer Memorial, Court St. 9.00am. &
11.00am. Also at **Barmedman, Mahda,**
Talimba & Weethalle.
Mr. Lance Jackson (02) 6972 2143.

WOLLONGONG (St Andrew's)
Cnr Kembla & Burelli Sts. 9.45am. &
6.00pm. Rev Bruce Hammonds
(02) 4271 1545(H) (02) 4226 1725(O).

WOOLGOOLGA
Cnr Scarborough St. & Landrigan Cl.
9.00am. Rev. Peter Moore (02) 6651 2301.

WOONONA
7 Gray St. Rev Peter Currie (02) 4284 4057.

WOY WOI
120 Blackwall Rd. 9.00 & 10.30 am.
Rev. Jamie Newans (02) 4342 2856

queensland

ACACIA RIDGE
Cnr. Mortimer & Beaudesert Rds.
9.00am. & 6.00pm. Pastor Stephen Teale,
(07) 3277 0010, (07) 3711 3022 (H).

ASCOT
68 Charlton St. (Near Airport).
Nundah: 14 Rode Rd
Rev Guido Kettmiss (07) 3216 4151.
Rev Les Hall (07) 3267 0558

ATHERTON
Cnr. Alice & Jack Sts. 10.00am & 6.00pm.
Rev. John Trappett (07) 4091 1375.

BALD HILLS
58 Strathpine Rd. 8.30am. & 7.00pm.
Rev Peter Bloomfield (07) 3261 4305.

BRISBANE KOREAN
145 Ann St. 8.00am. 12.00 noon, 7.30pm.
Rev Dr M. M. Y. Kim (07) 3300 3132

BRISBANE (St Paul's)
53 St Pauls Tce. Spring Hill.
Rev A. Gardiner (07) 3831 7458(O).

BUNDABERG (Scots')
Cnr. Water & Alice Sts. 9.00am & 7.00pm.
Rev David Newman (07) 4153 2954

CABOOLTURE
24 Cottrill Road. 9.00am & 6.00pm.
Rev. G. Watt (07) 5494 1181

CAIRNS
85 Sheridan St. 9.15 am. & 6.30 pm.
Rev Donald Broadwater, (07) 4036 0421(H).
Rev Russell van Delden, (07) 4054 3241 (H).

CALLIDE VALLEY
Biloela: Cnr. Kariboe & Melton Sts.
10.00am. & 6.00pm.
Jambin: Three Ways 8.30am.
Pastor Walter Posthuma (07) 4992 1441

CALOUNDRA
Cnr Kalinga & Ormutz Sts. 9.30am. &
7.00pm. Rev N. Thomason (07) 5493 3594

CHARLEVILLE/BLACKALL
78 Galatea St. 9.00am.
Pastor Alan Grant (07) 4654 3100.

CHARTERSTOWERS
Blackthorn Hall, Thornburgh College,
King St. Mr. S. Mcdonald (07) 4787 3395

CLAYFIELD (Scots Memorial)
29 Bellevue Terrace, 9.30am.
I.M. Rev. Robert Herrgott (07) 3300 6158

COORPAROO
Emlyn St. 10.00am. & 7.00pm.
I.M. Rev D. Mihailovic (07) 3800 3799

CREEK ROAD
Presbyterian Ministry Centre, Cnr. Creek &
Fursden Rds. **Carina** 9.00 am & 6.30 pm.
Centre: (07) 3398 4333.
Rev Peter Barson (07) 3399 3607.

DALBY
Condamine St. (cnr. Patrick St).
Rev Roland Lowther (07) 4669 7074

EUMUNDI
Memorial Drive, 10.45am. (weekly) &
6.30pm. (2nd & 4th Sunday).
I.M. Rev. Noel C. Thomason (07) 5493 3594

GAYNDAH
Warton St. 10.00am.
I.M. Rev. Noel C. Thomason (07) 5493 3594

GLADSTONE (St Andrew's)
Goondoon & Bramston Sts. 10.00am. &
7.00pm. **Benaraby:** O'Connor Rd. 8.00am.
Also **Calliope.**
Rev. David Secomb (07) 4972 1058

GOLD COAST (I)
Arundel: 132 Allied Drive 9.15am.
I.M. Rev. John Morrow (07) 5571 5676
Robina: Cnr University & Cottesloe Drives
10.00 am. & 6.30 pm.
Rev. Kevin Ridley (07) 5571 1416

GOLD COAST (II)
Mudgeeraba: Cnr Mudgeeraba Rd &
Regency Pde. 9.00am. & 6.30 pm.
Rev. Glenn Samuel (07) 5530 7003

Mudgeeraba Korean Congregation:
11.30 am. Rev. Jo Kim (07) 5574 4001

GOLD COAST (III)
Palm Beach/Elanora: 'The Meeting Place'
Cnr. Coolgardie & Guineas Creek Rds.
(cnr. Pines Shopping Ctre) 9.00 am.
Rev. Donald Geddes (07) 5522 8982.

GRACEVILLE
12 Bank Road. 9.30am.
Rev. Norm Bartlett (07) 3712 0508

GYMPIE
11 Crown St. 9.30am. Woolooga 11.00am.
Rev. D Cranney (07) 5482 7629(O).

HERVEY BAY (St David's)
Denmans Rd, Scarness, 9.30am. & 7.00pm.
Rev. John T Roth (07) 4124 7018.

ITHACA
100 Enogerra Tce, Paddington.
Service: 9.30 am. 6.30pm.
Rev. Robert Herrgott (07) 3300 6158

DAY 9 *Dead men walking*

THE PASSAGE REVELATION 3:1-6

THE POINT Can a more disparaging evaluation be made of a church than this: 'You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead'? Yet Jesus was prepared to declare it publicly of the Church in Sardis, in order to warn them and bring them to repentance! And, in spite of this fact, there were still individual believers who were spiritually alive and persevering in their faith.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus remains Lord of the Church He purchased with His own blood – and knows what our true spiritual condition is.
- It is possible for a Church to have a good reputation as being spiritually alive and yet be dead – a very serious warning!
- God exposes sin in order to give opportunity to repent, but the time to respond is limited and can be terminated without notice.
- Whole churches can be under condemnation while some faithful saints remain untarnished. Swift action must be taken to awaken the Church while they still remain as a spark of life.
- True believers have their names set securely in the book of life; they are clothed in Christ's righteousness and He pleads for them.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What do people think of your Church? What does Jesus think?

DAY 10 *The Key of David*

THE PASSAGE REVELATION 3:7-13

THE POINT The Church in Philadelphia was much like the one in Smyrna: they suffered at the hands of the deluded 'chosen people' (Jews); they received only praise, without criticism; they were persecuted by Satanic opponents for their faith; a crown of life would reward their resolute, obedient witness as those loved by Jesus.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus is God's agent (holy), He is trustworthy (true), and He alone decides who the inhabitants of God's Kingdom are – who is included and who is excluded (key of David, etc – cf Isaiah 22:22).
- The faithful believers may have been despised and barred from association with those who claimed to be God's people, but the open door of genuine salvation was there to welcome them.
- Although considered weak and useless by the prosperous community among whom they lived they were strong and steadfast in what really mattered – their commitment to Christ and His Gospel.
- Severe trials will come to the Church but those who overcome will be secured a place as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- The Church is the true Israel today, the chosen people of God, and by God's grace will inherit all of His covenant promises.

DAY 11 *Affluent... but effluent*

THE PASSAGE REVELATION 3:14-22

THE POINT The Laodicean situation was probably even more contemptible and dangerous than that in Sardis. They also were unaware of the peril they were in. They were quite comfortable with things as they were: blessed with material resources and no-one really rocking the boat or getting too fanatical about their faith. But that was the problem! King Jesus wanted some action, some enthusiasm. Tepid Christianity is worse than cold Christianity! And God was willing to show His love through discipline and on the basis of true repentance would reinstate them at His throne.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus rules, and is the authentic witness to God's revelation.
- Jesus looks for and expects a spirited response from His people.
- We can appear prosperous and healthy – but be spiritually destitute. Only Jesus can cover our nakedness and give us true sight.
- Jesus' criticism and harsh treatment are intended for our good.
- Jesus longs to be welcomed into the life of His Church; He meets our initiative with His invitation to share in His heavenly home.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- In what ways is the Church in developed Western countries in danger of making the same mistake as the Church in Laodicea?

DAY 12 *Our God reigns*

THE PASSAGE REVELATION 4:1-6A

THE POINT Following the details of Jesus' concerns as He moves among His Church on earth, John is given a vision of how he rules in heaven. This vision will enable him to see something of the power, authority and glory with which Jesus now reigns, and this will help him and his readers to cope with the difficulties they will face in 'what must take place after this' in their lives on earth.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus overcame evil and entered the door of heaven to sit and reign with God His Father (3:21). John is now shown a picture of what this means for those who overcome through His name and enter His glory through the door He has opened (cf John 10:9).
- The trumpet-like voice signifies a public announcement to all.
- The 'vision' John received would encourage believers because they would see that whatever happened God was in control.
- The symbolic representation of the throne and its occupants and surroundings portrayed a picture of glory, beauty and power.
- The 24 elders on thrones depict the OT and NT Church (12+12).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- With threats of terrorism today and intensifying opposition to the true Gospel, are you encouraged by this glimpse of heaven?

DAY 13 *Every knee shall bow*

THE PASSAGE REVELATION 4:6B-11

THE POINT The picture God reveals to us of himself is unacceptable to natural, unregenerate man. He cannot tolerate such egotism! But in the heavenly realm it is quite clear to all that God is entirely worthy of all the praise given to Him: He is thrice holy; He is almighty; He is eternal ('was, is and is to come'); He brought into being all that is and substantiates its existence. In the end, all earthly power and glory must submit fully to His sovereign rule.

THE PARTICULARS

- The 4 living ones have similarities with the vision in Ezekiel 1 and may symbolise all creation bowing in worship before God: the wild and strong (lion); the domestic and servile (ox); intelligent man in the image of God; and the swift and free (eagle). Their many eyes may speak of the all-encompassing aspect of their worship. The wings relate to cherubim who obey the Lord at His bidding. The elders, representing the Church universal, unite with them in harmonious and devoted worship, giving all glory to God.
- All glory, honour and power belong alone to the God of Creation.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Make a list of all the attributes and works of God that show Him to be worthy of all our praise and worship. Use this list as the basis for praising Him today and reflect on what He means to you.

DAY 14 *Jesus, the Key to all history*

THE PASSAGE REVELATION 5:1-5

THE POINT The scroll represents the whole course of Creation's history from its beginning to its climax in the Return of Christ. But it is a confusing history: there is good and evil, success and failure, clarity and perplexity. What is the key to this mystery? Is there no-one who can explain the puzzle? Yes there is! It is the story of God's redeeming love in His Son, Jesus Christ, who died on a cross of shame to redeem a people for himself – the Church!

THE PARTICULARS

- The writing on both sides of the scroll, and its 7 seals, symbolise that it completely covers every aspect and event of all human history – it is one complete story, there is nothing beyond it.
- Breaking the seals symbolises explaining the meaning of the scroll, ie providing a solution, a key, to the whole riddle of life.
- Only one person is qualified to do this, the Lord Jesus Christ, who died and rose again in fulfilment of all the OT. Without Jesus the whole Universe remains a mystery (see 2 Cor. 1:20).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What does this passage teach us about Christianity in relation to all other religions or attempts to explain the meaning of life? What does this mean for apologetics? evangelism? missions?

DAY 15 *The song of heaven*

THE PASSAGE REVELATION 5:6-14

THE POINT Here we have heaven's glorious theme song. Chapter 4 gave us a picture of the whole creation praising God as Creator. Now we see the whole creation praising Him as Redeemer. The extent of their praise defies description and their song is one of the most beautiful songs in Scripture. It's the song we'll sing in heaven.

THE PARTICULARS

- At the very centre of the throne is a Lamb bearing the marks of slaughter. Jesus' sacrificial death is at the heart of who He is – the Redeemer of God's Elect (see John 12:32-33, Philipp. 2:8-9). The Lion of Judah who can open the seals is the crucified Lamb.
- The Lamb has 7 horns (complete power) and 7 eyes (complete insight) and is fully connected with the Holy Spirit's ministry.
- Our prayers are part of the worship of the Church Triumphant.
- The Elect consist of a very large but finite number of those purchased with the blood of the Lamb to reign as kings and priests.
- Ultimately all creation will praise the Lamb (Philipp. 2:10-11).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How necessary to the story of Creation is the story of Redemption? Does Creation really make any sense without Redemption (see Revelation 13:8, 17:8, 1 Peter 1:18-21, Matthew 25:34)?

DAY 16 *A world in conflict*

THE PASSAGE REVELATION 6:1-8

THE POINT Christ's opening of the seals shows His sovereign control over all history. The four horsemen of the apocalypse show this in terms of Judgement. As the opening of the seals continues we'll see that the Church has nothing to fear because no matter what disaster occurs it is all under the Lord's control and will be for the ultimate benefit of His Church – it is He who opens the seals!

THE PARTICULARS

- The things that have always darkened human history are abuse of power (white horse), hostility (red horse), deprivation and the unjust distribution of resources (black horse), and the reality of death and hopelessness through war, famine, disease and a world out of harmony with its Designer/Creator (pale horse).
- It was the Lamb, the crucified Christ, who opened these 4 seals, showing that He is the Sovereign Lord of all history, including judgement as well as mercy (cf Isaiah 45:7). It was the 4 living creatures who summoned the riders to 'Come!', showing that the Creation acknowledges its own implication in its suffering.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What evidence can we see in our world today of the relevance of the opening of the first 4 seals? How are God's sovereignty and man's responsibility seen to work together in current events?

DAY 17 *How long, Sovereign Lord?*

THE PASSAGE REVELATION 6:9-17

THE POINT The opening of seals 5 and 6 gives a context in which to answer the big question, 'Why do bad things happen to good people?'. In the end the whole Creation is under God's Judgement and subject to the outpouring of His wrath. This was to be the inevitable result of Adam's rebellion. Noah's flood was the first of many previews of the final events John saw depicted when the 6th seal was opened. But during the course of human history God has been rescuing His Elect from the final impact of the Day of Wrath. The number of them, and the extent of the unjust suffering they must endure in the Fallen world, are fixed quantities known to the Sovereign Lord. Thus, their final vindication is assured, but it must await the full outworking of the total Plan.

THE PARTICULARS

- The Elect are known to God and are securely in His presence, clothed in a white robe – the righteousness of Christ (see 3:4-5).
- The end of the world will be a terrifying cosmic event with dire consequences from which none will escape (symbolised by listing 7 classes: kings, princes, generals, rich, mighty, slave, free).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do you find comfort in the opening of the 5th seal? Christians are suffering unjustly today but God knows what He is doing!

DAY 18 *When the roll is called*

THE PASSAGE REVELATION 7:1-8

THE POINT We see here that the number of the Elect (144,000) is clearly symbolic (in spite of what Jehovah's Witnesses try to tell us!). In Revelation, 12 (3x4) represents the Covenant which the Triune God (3) has made with the earth (4, cf 4 winds in verse 1). Thus, 7 (3+4) represents completeness (cf 7 churches, 7 seals, etc, and comment on 6:15 yesterday). The number 1,000 is used to represent a very large but fixed, finite number known to God (cf 1,000 years in 20:6). The Church, the New Israel, consists of a vast multitude (cf 7:9) from both the Old (12 tribes) and New (12 Apostles) Testament dispensations and represented by the number 144,000 (1000x12x12). The naming of the tribes with the same number from each confirms the numbers are symbolic. The important thing, however, is that the Elect are known to God by name and their eternal security is sealed in heaven. Nothing at all can harm them (cf John 10:28f, Romans 8:38f).

THE PARTICULARS

- History is not the outworking of a contest between good and evil the result of which is unknown. It is the plan of a Sovereign God who controls all things for the final good of his Church.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What is your security in this threatened, fragile world?

DAY 19 *A glimpse of Heaven*

THE PASSAGE REVELATION 7:9-17

THE POINT John was given a glimpse into heaven: who are there, why they are there, what they are doing, what it is like. Knowing something of these things helps us to cope with how things are on earth. It's much easier to live with frustration and hardship if we know that everything is moving towards a good ending, that the things that confuse us now have a purpose in God's eternal plan, a plan which cannot be foiled. Rejoice in this scene!

THE PARTICULARS

- Humanly speaking, the number of God's Redeemed is countless. And they are made up of people from every part of the globe!
- The white robes point to justification, the palms to victory. Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb, is at the centre with the Father. All glory and praise are directed to them alone. All is made new.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Does your congregation reflect what heaven will be like? How many different nations and languages are represented? Do you sing the praise of Jesus enthusiastically when you meet together for worship? Is Jesus the focus of your worship? Do you see each other as sinners saved by grace, clothed in Christ's righteousness alone? Is 'serving' a key word? Do your attitudes show evidence of God's healing power at work? Is there joy?

DAY 20 *The power of prayer*

THE PASSAGE REVELATION 8:1-5

THE POINT The opening of the 7th seal introduces us to another look at the whole course of history, this time symbolised by the sounding of 7 trumpets. But before this new revelation actually begins, two significant things happen which serve to remind us of the awesome privilege that is ours. Firstly, the long silence reminds us that we are being brought into the very presence of the God who is Creator, who controls every event in history, and who has achieved our eternal salvation through the death of his own Son. Secondly, we are told that we participate actively in the process of history through our prayers!

THE PARTICULARS

- The trumpets will announce the coming judgements but they are suspended by the intervention of the prayers of the saints.
- The prayers of the saints (those made holy as God's Elect by redemption in Christ) are a significant part of God's working.
- Our prayers are assisted by God's ministering spirits (see Hebrews 1:14, Romans 8:26-27). They are part of our worship.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Has your awareness of God been deepened by these studies?
- Do you realise what power you are wielding when you pray?



Across Australia

Scots turns 180

The oldest presbyterian congregation in Australia, **Scots Church, Sydney**, celebrated its 180th anniversary on 1 June 2003, Pentecost Sunday. **Rev. Adrian Van Ash**, minister of Scots, preached from Acts 2. Many friends were welcomed, including **Father Gary Reynolds**, parish priest, and other members of the **St Patrick's** pastoral team, in whose Crypt the Scots congregation currently meet. Scots was founded in 1823 by the redoubtable **Rev. Dr John Dunmore Lang**. The Scots Church congregation is awaiting the refurbishment of the old Assembly Hall.

And Toukley turns 50

About 130 gathered on the beautiful winter afternoon of 2 August to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the opening of the original **St David's Toukley** by the then **Presbytery of North Sydney**. The **Toukley RSL Pipes and Drums** piped state moderator **Rt Rev. Stuart Andrews**, the minister, former ministers and home missionaries and the church session into the church. The service was conducted by **Rev. Peter Dunstan** who also presented a short history.

Pilkington moderates again

At the 2003 **Queensland General Assembly**, **Elder Ron Pilkington** of **Ann Street**, Brisbane, was elected moderator for the 2004 Assembly and the following year. Ron served as **Queensland Moderator** in 1991, the first ruling elder to be so appointed.

Aged care chaplain

On 5 August the **Presbytery of Sydney** set apart **Rev. Dr Phillip Paul** as chaplain to **Presbyterian Aged Care**. **Rev. Craig Tucker** led the worship and **Rev. Robert Tsai** preached.

Outback adventure

Sydney's Quiz Worx team visited 14 towns in three states in a week recently, including Bourke, Birdsville, Tibooburra, Roxby Downs and Leigh Creek. Quiz

Stewart Richmond Dinnon

1922 – 2003

On Saturday 16 August, an overflowing congregation of family and friends met at **St Andrews, Launceston**, to give thanks for the life and witness of **Stewart Dinnen, MA, MBE**. A few days earlier, at 81 and after a long battle with pneumonia, he was promoted to glory.

Born at **Airdrie** in Scotland in April 1922, he was converted as a youngster through the faithful witness of his **Sunday School teacher**. Stewart went on to become a valiant servant of the Lord, as a preacher, teacher, writer, missionary statesman and influential leader in the work of the gospel.

Sharing the gospel was his passion, and it was for this purpose that he and his wife **Marie** joined **WEC** in 1949. Through a lifetime of undiminished commitment and zeal, he served as director of studies at **WEC's Missionary Training College** in Scotland; then as candidate director in the USA; principal of the **WEC Missionary Training College** in Launceston, Tasmania; international director and finally ambassador-at-large for **WEC**.

He was a man whose faith was deeply rooted in the Scriptures, who

loved nothing better than to explain those rich truths simply, with telling anecdote or illustration, so that they could have a vital application. For Stewart the theme of his lifelong ministry was drawn from **John 15** – the absolute necessity of abiding in Christ and the resulting fruitfulness for the believer. For him this was the secret of effective Christian witness and service. For more than 40 years he had been a committed and faithful member of **St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Launceston**, serving as an elder there since October 1964.

Stewart was constantly engaged in the work of the gospel, ministering tirelessly to many in churches near and far, addressing conferences at home and abroad, and writing prolifically to encourage others in the service of Christ. He was a mentor to many, and thousands of people around the world bear testimony to the gracious influence he has had in their lives. The tributes and phone calls that his wife and family have received during his illness and homecall bear eloquent testimony to this fact

Peter Thorneycroft

Worx is a team of young people, plus a few puppets, who present the good news of Jesus Christ in a fun way to children. At each town they delighted the local school children with a puppet show teaching the message of God's love. One of the founding members of **Quiz Worx**, **Matt Gorton**, attends **St David's Presbyterian Church, Strathfield**.

New missionary

Matthew Byrne of **Seacliffe (SA)** has been accepted for missionary service through the **Australian Presbyterian World Mission** and was set apart by the **Presbytery of Torrens** on 12 July.

New elders

John Clewett, **Walter Posthuma**, **Robert Richards**, **James Watson** and **Stephen Watson** have been ordained/inducted into **Toowoomba**

South (Qld). **Peter Anthony**, **Albertus Mostert** (inducted), **Thomas Conn**, **Graeme Scott** and **Eric Wilson** (ordained and inducted) were added to the session at **Anne Street** in Brisbane.

Chinese Christian Mission

Rev. John Leung, assistant minister of the **Burwood Chinese congregation** has been granted leave by the **Presbytery of Sydney** to serve as general secretary of the **Chinese Christian Mission** from 1 September.

PTC head in Singapore

Dr Douglas Milne, principal of the **Presbyterian Theological College** in Melbourne, spent two weeks in Singapore in July speaking and lecturing at various congregations and at the **Biblical Graduate School of Theology**. It was **Dr Milne's** second trip to Singapore.

PWA renewal

PWA spiritual renewal days have been conducted 17 times in New South Wales, reaching all but one presbytery. The subject has been The Holy Spirit – Wind Of Change. About 400 women have attended, some of whom had never been to a parish bible study, but have indicated that they intend to attend one from now on. The 2003/04 study on Forgiveness was launched on 4 June at the Presbyterian Resource Centre, Sydney.

Growth at Hawthorn

The congregation at Hawthorn, Vic, rejoiced recently as four of its covenant young people, Michael and Ellice Hutchinson, and Andrew and Fiona Nicholson were admitted to communicant membership.

Looking up at Seaford Rise

On 20 July a special service was held at Seaford Rise (SA) to mark the re-opening by the Seaford congregation of a mission outreach to the area. Worship services are held in the drama room of the local school. Nearly 80 people attended opening worship which was conducted by the new pastor, Ian Smith. Most of the

Adelaide churches were represented as well as several prospective parishioners. Prayers were offered for the work of Ian and his wife Jan, by Rev. Dr Reg Mathews (Para Hills-Norwood) and Rev. Stephen Slucki (Seacliffe).

New junior school

Work has started on the new junior school at Presbyterian Ladies College, Melbourne. Around 100 guests gathered on 21 May to watch Mrs Janet Davies, an old girl and parent of a Junior School girl, assisted by Whitney Winspear, year 6, and Rebecca Subbiah, Prep, turn the first sod. The principal, Mrs Elizabeth Ward, said: "This is the most significant building venture for the college since the move from East Melbourne in 1957." The building is scheduled to be ready for student use by the start of Term 4, 2004.

A taste of Sudan

A Sudanese choir from Clayton (Vic) sang at the recent wedding of Rhys Hall and Rhonnda Price held the Castlemaine (Vic) church. Rhonnda was given away by her brother, Rev. Hugh Price. Her attendants included her sister Mavis, a missionary with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Papua New Guinea, her sister-in-law

Hannah, and Esther Suwa. Rev. Bernard Suwa, Esther's husband – both are from Sudan – was the best man. Rev. Keith Black, former director of SUM/Action Partners, performed the ceremony which was attended by about 350 people. Both Rhys and Rhonnda have worked for many years in Southern Sudan. They have returned to missionary service in Uganda.



Around the World

Arrests in Iran

Two women, both members of an evangelical church, have been arrested in Teheran after an embassy dinner.

The arrests were thought to have been achieved through the intensive effort of the intelligence agency, which had carried out several raids against the evangelical community over the past few months.

The Supreme Guide of the Revolution had promised last year some measures against "people who try to turn youngsters away from their religion".

"We know enough about their activity and we will take whatever steps that are necessary," he claimed.

World Evangelical Alliance

Minister deported

Following long judicial delays, the United Arab Emirates has deported Rev. Fernando P. Alconga back to Manila, more than nine months after he was arrested in Dubai. "We have a smile on our lips and tears on our cheeks, just to be here," Alconga said from Manila. The Filipino pastor said a representative from the presidential palace and a TV camera crew met him, his wife and son on the tarmac at the Manila airport. Alconga, who had lived in Dubai since 1994, was arrested at a Dubai shopping centre last November and jailed for "preaching other than the Muslim religion" because he gave an Arab Muslim a Bible.

In April, a court found him guilty but suspended his one-year sentence. After a series of appeals, his deportation order was upheld by the Supreme Court on 12 July. Alconga said he believed that his arrest and trial helped unify the Christian community, both in the UAE and internationally.

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Ghana mission conference

Ghana Evangelical Missions Association will in November assemble key church leaders, missionaries, para-church organisations and all mission minded groups for a four-day conference in Accra. These leaders will deliberate on issues relating to the evangelisation of Ghana especially, and global missions as a whole.

Missionary leaders from across the globe will join their counterparts in Ghana to put together ideas and strategies that will help accelerate the work of missions in Ghana.

New Ghana Mail

Buddhists attack Christians

The Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka reports that five churches were attacked by mobs of Buddhist monks in early August, in what appears to be a planned campaign of violence directed specifically at Christian churches. The EASL believes this is part of a strategic effort by Buddhist monks to stir up negative feeling against the Christian community before an anti-conversion bill comes to the parliament again. A ground swell of sentiment against the church would make the bill even more popular. Less than 1 per cent of Sri Lanka is Protestant.

World Evangelical Alliance

Montagnard refugees

A member of Cambodia's parliament is calling for a stop to human rights violations against Montagnard refugees fleeing oppression in their native Vietnam. According to *Missions Insider*, Son Chhay appealed to the president, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, on 2 July. Thousands of Montagnards, many of them Christians, have fled across the border from Vietnam into Cambodia, only to be captured by the Cambodian authorities and returned to Vietnam where they face prison, torture and sometimes death. According to Chhay, the Vietnamese government has offered a bounty of one million Vietnamese dong (\$90.50 CDN) for each Montagnard returned.

Voice of the Martyrs

Half-hourly baptisms

Though anti-Christian activities by radical Hindus hinder many new believers from following the Lord in public baptism, one ministry in India told *Christian*

Aid it is recording two baptisms every hour.

The ministry, which had more than 2000 missionaries on the field early this year, baptized nearly two people every hour last year. This year, even though the ministry had to close all 21 of its regional Bible schools due to lack of funds, its workers together still baptized almost two people every hour. Every day they planted at least one pioneer church somewhere in South Asia, bringing its total number of church plants to over 3700.

Missions Insider

Gay bishop approved

The Anglican Church in the United States last month ratified the election of the first openly gay bishop at its national convention in Minneapolis.

Gene Robinson was confirmed as **Bishop of New Hampshire** by both the House of Deputies (laity and clergy) and the House of Bishops, to acclaim by gay groups and outrage by the leaders of more than half the world's 75 million Anglicans.

The leaders of the 38 regional churches plan to meet later this year to discuss the crisis, with many national churches threatening to cut all ties with the American church. African bishops warn it will lead to further persecutions, and even deaths, of Christians in Muslim areas. **Sydney Archbishop Peter Jensen**, a leader of evangelicals in the West, has said Bishop Robinson and his supporters are not welcome in Sydney.

The Age



On the Agenda

By Barney Zwartz

In a bid to resurrect the faltering fortunes of his controversial film about the death of Christ, **Mel Gibson** plans to show it to American Jewish leaders in the next month.

The Hollywood superstar-turned producer has so far given previews only to a select and conservative audience, who are reportedly asked to sign confidentiality agreements.

The Passion is not due for release for seven months, but observers say it already faces serious obstacles. Most notable is the controversy about whether it promotes anti-semitism, but Gibson has yet to find a distributor; it is in Latin and Aramaic with subtitles, and films with religious themes have a poor recent box office record.

Paul Lauer, director of marketing for Gibson's Icon Productions, told CNN that Icon planned to meet "eight to 10 significant Jewish leaders over the next 30 days".

Mr Lauer said the reaction had bothered Gibson, a Catholic arch-conservative who rejects Vatican II (the Catholic conference in the 1960s which "cleared" the Jews of deicide) and who has reportedly put up to \$50 million of his own money into the film.

"It's hurt him a great deal. He has many close Jewish friends. He's never

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been accused of any degree of anti-Semitism or hatred or bigotry.”

The chairman of the International Council for Jews and Christians, **Professor John Pawlikowski**, who has been visiting Australia, said he had received a private briefing from a rabbi who saw the film in Houston.

Professor Pawlikowski, of the University of Chicago, sparked the controversy in May when he was given a leaked copy of the film script. He assembled a team of Catholic and Jewish scholars to examine it in the light of Icon's claim that it complied with Vatican guidelines on presentations of the death of Christ.

“The reaction of everyone on the team was that it was one of the worst things we'd seen in 25 years,” Professor Pawlikowski said. It put the worst possible interpretation on the Jews' role in Christ's execution.

Professor Pawlikowski fears the film will incite persecution in less stable societies or countries where anti-semitism is already strong, and undermine four decades of interfaith dialogue.

He said he had an email from **Rabbi Eugene Korn** of the Anti-Defamation

League, comparing the script he had with the film.

“Most of the objectionable parts were still there,” he said. “Gibson doesn't understand the charge. If we're talking about the sort of gutter anti-semitism we've been receiving by email since this whole thing broke – Jews are the cancer of America – we're definitely not accusing Gibson of such anti-semitism.

“We say the film violated guidelines for the presentation of the death of Christ, and incorrect presentation has been among the chief causes of anti-semitism through the ages.”

According to the briefing from Rabbi Korn, the film has dropped the unhistorical scene of the cross being built by Jews in the Temple, a scene where Jews put a bag over Jesus' head, and a line from Pilate to the Jewish mob “you are thirsting for His body and blood”.

Still in that the critics object to are crowds of bloodthirsty Jews, High Priest Caiaphas as the prime mover, who taunts Jesus moments before he dies, and another line from Pilate: “Do you always half-kill your prisoners before judgment?”

The **Anti-Defamation League's US director, Abraham Foxman**, said

recently: “We are deeply concerned that the film, if released in its present form, will fuel the hatred, bigotry and anti-Semitism that many responsible churches have worked hard to repudiate.”

But conservatives have called it “beautiful” and “magical”. **US Catholic League president William Donohoe** responded to Mr Foxman, saying Gibson would “be wise to ignore the ADL's politicised attack”.

He said: “The movie is not anti-Semitic and does not need to be changed. Revisionist history is dishonest history and must be resisted.”

Professor Pawlikowski, a Catholic priest, welcomed the planned dialogues, but was skeptical. “It depends on who will be invited. So far the guest list has been very restricted. I heard he was furious that Rabbi Korn got in.

“Is Gibson afraid these complaints are having an effect on potential viewers? It's hard to say. His PR people are even less aware of the issues than he is. His PR man said, ‘there are those who are for Christ and those who are against’, and I presume he put us in the latter category.

“It's so simplistic. No one's telling him not to make the film.”

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Speak up

Prayer is not a spiritual shopping list. It's a conversation.

One of the first public speeches I delivered was in high school. For days I gathered information. I prepared an outline and practised dramatic techniques to enhance my presentation. I rehearsed until I was certain of a good grade. When the big day arrived, I gave my talk precisely as I had prepared it.

Much to my dismay, however, the teacher was not as pleased as I. Her comment was stinging. "Fine content, but you never looked at us. I wasn't sure whether you were more interested in us or in your notes." That day I learned an important lesson. We show our regard for others by looking at them when we talk.

Psalms 123:2 suggests the same is true when we talk to God. A servant's look is not an occasional glance at God but an intense gaze at Him:

"As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master,

As the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress,

So our eyes look to the Lord our God,
Till He shows us His mercy."

These servants fix their eyes on the Master's hand. Their attention is so intense they refuse to turn away "till He shows us His mercy".

This portrait stands in sharp contrast to many of our prayers. Instead of centring on God, most Christians only glance occasionally in His direction. Generally our prayers begin with an address toward God: "Our Father," "Lord Jesus," "Heavenly Father." We intersperse His name throughout a prayer: "Lord ... Lord ... Lord". And typically our prayers close with "in Jesus' name, Amen."

This is often, however, nearly all the attention God receives. In a prayer lasting 10 minutes, we will usually spend less than sixty seconds focusing primarily on God.

This neglect of God reveals a basic misunderstanding about prayer. We often treat prayer like a spiritual shopping list. We walk into God's general store, give a perfunctory nod in His direction, and then proceed to the real reason we came – the grocery list. How easy it is to forget that we are dealing with a divine person, not a heavenly mail-order catalogue. When we focus too much on *what* we



Richard Pratt

need, we are bound to neglect the One *whom* we need.

These observations should make us stop and examine our prayers. What do we think about as we pray? We can easily become so absorbed with our material and spiritual needs that they crowd out all thoughts of God. We must guard against reducing prayer solely to concern for our needs. Sporadic and half-hearted attention to God will never yield life-enriching prayer. We must cultivate the look of a servant, an intense gaze at God.

There are many ways we can develop an intense gaze toward God. One helpful method for focusing on God is to address Him meaningfully. Usually we address God by only a few titles: "Father," "God," "Lord," "Jesus". While these names are full of wonderful meaning, often we use them so frequently that we do not stop to think about their meaning. The habit of addressing God in these familiar ways can cause our minds to drift away from intense concern with Him.

One of the first steps toward renewing our attention to God is to address Him with variety. Variation creates new interest in God. For instance, thinking about Him as the "Exalted King", "Mighty Fortress" or "Giver of Life" immediately stirs our hearts. These titles help us focus more clearly on who God is and what He does for us.

The Bible provides countless ways of addressing God: righteous Judge (2 Tim. 4:8), Head of the Church (cf Eph. 1:22), Firstborn of creation (cf Col. 1:15), Firstborn among many brothers (Rom. 8:29), King of Kings (Rev. 19:16), Morning Star (Rev. 22:16), chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20), Lamb of God (John

1:29). Each of these is full of powerful significance that draws us toward Him.

If so many possibilities for addressing God are available to us, how should we choose from among them? Psalm 68:5 illustrates a useful principle:

"A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,

Is God in His holy dwelling."

This passage expresses the truth that different people need God in different ways. God reveals himself as a protecting husband to the widow and as a father to the orphan.

His character is so rich and multifaceted that He deals with us according to our individual needs. The gospel presents Jesus as one who meets the variety of needs created by sin and rebellion against God. In His grace, God reveals Himself as the answer to our individual circumstances.

In the Psalms, God is frequently addressed in ways that correspond directly to the needs of the one praying. When the Psalmist desires forgiveness, he addresses God appropriately:

"Restore us again, O God our Saviour,
And put away your displeasure toward us" (Ps. 85:4).

In a context dealing with the reversal of calamity, the psalmist says,

"Lord, you have been *our dwelling place*

Throughout all generations" (Ps. 90:1).

Today, we too may call on God in ways that are appropriate to our concerns. In times of sorrow, we may refer to Him as our Comforter. When discouraged, we may address Him as our Hope and Courage. Joyful prayers may speak of God as our Strength and Song. Whatever the case, addressing God in ways that are particularly relevant to the rest of our prayer enlivens our attention to Him. In this way, we avoid focusing simply on our needs and move closer to centring our prayers on God Himself, the One who can deal with our needs.

This is an edited extract from Pray With Your Eyes Open by Richard Pratt (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987).



Lock up your daughters

There are Christians abroad, and the media knows what they are like.

Turn back the clock 2000 years, and Christians were targets of gossip and innuendo. This fledgling “religion” was making waves – and causing confusion – all around the Roman Empire. Labelled “atheists” for their lack of a visible “god”, Christians were accused of incest (because they spoke of “loving their brothers and sisters”) and of human sacrifice (because they apparently “ate the body and blood” of Jesus.) It’s easy to be misunderstood... and even easier for a hostile world to take advantage of the misunderstandings. Charges like these were grounds for the execution of countless Christians, and an outpouring of public distaste.

Let’s not get carried away by the comparisons – but I wonder if we’re living in similar times. In a way, we deserve it. Every fresh allegation of church-centred sexual abuse probably counts for another 10 cases that will never see the light of day. After decades of denial, the lid has blown off – and so it should.

The danger though, comes when the pendulum swings too far. Suddenly, simply being Christian or associating with a church can carry sinister connotations.

Take, for instance, recent reports in Queensland’s *Courier Mail* about a parole application from Valmae Beck. Beck, a “notorious child-killer,” claims she has found God, and is “carefully preparing her case for a return to society”. Beck, we are told, was jailed for life in 1988 for her role in a shocking abduction and murder



Phil Campbell

of a Noosa schoolgirl. According to reports from a fellow prisoner, Beck has “become religious... is dedicated to her Bible studies and often acts as a mediator among prisoners”.

I’m in no position to assess the authenticity of Beck’s profession of faith – though I suggest that genuine penitence would lead to submission to just punishment. My point is simply to highlight the pithy sub-headline that accompanied the

I can’t help sensing that public perception is swinging towards a suspicion that Christians are a dangerous breed.

story. It read “Christian killer in parole bid”. The casual use of the adjective carries all kinds of connotations, including the unconscious suspicion that “Christians” do this kind of thing all the time.

That’s an impression confirmed by reports of the attempted Qantas hijack in late May. Former computer analyst David Robinson allegedly attacked two flight attendants with “sharpened stakes” during a flight to Tasmania. There is speculation, said reports in one newspaper, “that Robinson was aggrieved by the recent break-up with his girlfriend”. But keep reading. “The regular church-goer is believed to have been on the way to see her in Launceston, Tasmania, when the incident took place.”

Melbourne’s *Herald Sun* pursued the angle further on 2 June, taking us into Robinson’s local church. “The congregation at St Peter’s yesterday bowed their heads in prayer for a fellow parishioner who stands accused of attempting to hijack Qantas flight 1737,” wrote journalist Mark Dunn.

So let’s think it through.

What possible relevance is there in the fact that Robinson was allegedly a “regu-

lar church-goer?” Perhaps he was a regular Rotarian as well. Or a regular shopper at a Coles Supermarket? Why not mention that? Somehow, there’s something satisfyingly sinister about the conjunction of “church-goer” and “hijacker”.

Once, it would have been mentioned for the sake of dissonance – what could be more out-of-character? Now, I’m not so sure.

Finally, consider the appalling case of convicted paedophile Geoffrey Robert Dobbs. Jailed for life on July 24, District Court Judge Kerry O’Brien called Dobbs Australia’s “worst child sex offender”. The statistics are stunning.

The Telstra computer expert videotaped his encounters with more than 250 underage girls. According to the *Herald Sun* on 25 July, Dobbs targeted his victims at church, through friends of his daughters, and during his time as a gymnastics coach, as well as preying on the daughters of work colleagues. Incredibly, both the Fairfax *Sydney Morning Herald*, and News Limited *Courier Mail*, lead both the “target list”, and the associated descriptions of Dobbs, with the word “church”.

The reality is, Dobbs used his church networks the way he used every other social network at his disposal. But that’s a reality that wasn’t reflected in newspaper and television reports – especially initial reports on TEN News, which casually referred to Dobbs as a “church worker”.

Again, it’s easy to see how neatly the phrases “church worker” and “Australia’s worst child sex offender” flow together. It’s known in the trade as “great copy.”

Paranoia? I hope so. But I can’t help sensing that public perception is swinging towards a suspicion that Christians are a dangerous breed. Work hard, won’t you, to show your local community a genuine faith, reflected in lives of integrity and love. It may not make great copy, but at least it will give your non-Christian friends another perspective.

Phil Campbell, a member of the ministry team at Mitchelton Presbyterian Church, Qld, is Culture Watch editor.

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The unbeliever

A new doubting Thomas finds few answers.

James Wood has established himself as one of the most influential critics in the English-speaking world. His first book, *The Broken Estate: Essays on Literature on Belief* (1999), included an account of his upbringing in a strongly evangelical British family and his loss of faith in his teens, and skepticism toward religion in general and Christianity in particular is a recurring theme in the brilliant essay-reviews he contributes to *The New Republic* and elsewhere. It is no surprise, then, that his first novel contains a strident polemic against religious belief.

Indeed, at first glance, *The Book Against God* may offer little to recommend itself to Christian readers. It depicts no conversions and answers none of the profound and unsettling questions it poses. Yet it presents a compelling and powerful portrait of religious belief.

We are introduced to Thomas Bunting, the novel's narrator, four months after the death of his father, an exuberant Anglican priest. Thomas's wife, a talented pianist, has left him, and he has abandoned a PhD program that he had begun at University College, London, eight years earlier. He has little to show for himself, besides four large notebooks of theological and anti-theological arguments and the story of his unhappy life.

He considers the notebooks, a sprawling treatise he calls the "Book Against God", his life's work. But his story isn't as much an argument against God as it is a memorial of his father, Peter.

Thomas grew up in the cloistered, northern English village of Sundershall, "barely more than a single corridor of low cottages opening out on to the green release of a lawn shaded by three or four unremarkable trees".

Here, in the small parish church, his father dispensed "a Christianity that was inseparable from life. The rhythms of the village, and of the seasons, were also the rhythms of my father's ministry: rising Easter, and sun-favoured summer, and census-gathering Christmas, when, as if in mimicry of the story of Caesar Augustus, all the villagers came to be counted and for once the church was truly full."

Peter Bunting was "a great Christian

**Garrett
Brown**

optimist ... He was very erudite, and rather prided himself on his worldly sense of humour, aware that this was rare in priests. For instance, he wrote book reviews for a journal of theology in London, which sent him advance copies of the books. He had removed a sticker from one of these and glued it to the favorite of his six different bibles. It read, "This is an advance copy sent in lieu of proof." This, Thomas informs us, was "characteristic of his humour and of his faith. He was hospitable to all enemies."

Thomas never understands the impetus for such hospitality, which he considers dishonest. He is particularly annoyed by his father's evasiveness in their arguments. Thomas complains that his father "aerated his faith with so many little holes, so much flexibility and doubt and easygoing tolerance, that he simply disappeared down one of the holes". Thomas wants more from his father than banter. He wants something solid, something absolute, against which he can define himself and his views.

Nevertheless, he reveres his father's learning. "Growing up, I feared him," he writes, "for there was nothing that he didn't know. The stock of his knowledge was continually bubbling, and any novelty or spice could be added to it, without a fundamental change to the flavour. An extraordinarily sure mind, calmly enriching itself, very flexible and alert."

In many ways, he wants to be like his father, but he tires of trying: "I want to be what a 19th-century thinker called an athlete of reason. But my father always made me feel, as it were, fat and short of breath, because he himself was a kind of athlete of

reason while simultaneously a knight of faith."

So when Thomas begins to entertain doubts about his faith in God, he chooses to hide them from his father and to retreat into his own world. Conscious of his wilful deception, he increasingly feels imprisoned by his father: "He was so sure that I would 'see the light'. But not if I put huge drapes up against the window! That was where the lying began, you see. My instinct was to hide myself, to hide my thoughts about God. A lie was necessary to protect the truth, that was obvious, as clothes hid the truth of the body."

Thomas's original sin leads to a habit of lying and deception. He becomes addicted to the rush he feels when he does it: "That curious ecstasy I felt when I lied was the ecstasy of freedom. I became unknowable, unaccountable at the moment I lied." His lying, once defensive or protective, becomes frequent and gratuitous, and it inevitably isolates him from his wife and his friends and family.

His decline is accelerated after his father suffers a non-fatal heart attack. Already dealing with the collapse of his marriage, Thomas must confront his strained relationship with his parents. He dutifully returns to Sundershall for a visit and, with little left for him in London, stays on for several months. Although he attempts to assure his parents that his dissertation is on track and that his life is therefore meaningful in some way, it is difficult for him to conceal his work on the *Book Against God*, which by this time has become an all-consuming passion.

His book, like his lying, is a conscious assertion of his freedom from his parents and the claims of religion. To sustain that freedom, he feels compelled to develop his ideas about theology and to stoke his hostility to Christianity. What begins as the scribbling down of a few familiar objections to religious belief swells to massive proportions — raw evidence of his failure to tear himself from God, or at least from thoughts of God.

This obsessive project, which ultimately displaces his dissertation and much else besides, is not simply a rebellion against his parents. Thomas's objec-

tions to Christianity are carefully and thoughtfully articulated, often with support from eminent philosophers and literary figures, and the theological questions he poses are among the most difficult to answer. Thomas asks, for instance, “Why should anything be unfair, if God made the world?”

To this degree, Thomas is an earnest soul seeking the truth and struggling to come to terms with the injustice and cruelty he sees in life and death, sin and suffering.

Unfortunately, his unrelenting philosophical scrupulousness not only causes him to live a lie but also prevents him from accepting the love of those around him. It is his lying, in fact, that most grievously alienates the affection of his wife and hastens the end of his marriage. Later, during his visit home, rather than accepting the love and generosity of his parents, he feels “reproached, tormented, seduced, frustrated by the easiness with which they seemed to live”.

His bad habits — the lying, the irresponsibility, and the obsession with the “Book Against God” — worsen during these seven months. At one point, the appropriately named Peter, the rock of the village church, reaches out to his son, the appropriately named Thomas, the doubter, and expresses a genuine concern for his spiritual well-being, a concern for once without irony or evasion. But Thomas hides from his father behind the ultimate lie — that he still believes in God.

After his father dies a few short weeks later, he feels that he must tell the


plaintive truth to his father to justify himself, to give his lie purpose. Having put so much energy into opposing his father and his religion, he must remember his father to keep the argument, the rivalry with the ingenuous knight of faith, alive. The story he writes, the substance of *The Book Against God*, serves as his account of his father’s life and character. Without it, there is little to give Thomas’s life meaning and substance, since he has lost everything else.

For us, *The Book Against God* is something greater. It portrays a man who longs to understand the order of Creation and to know the unknowable mind of God. We admire him for this longing, this high seriousness about ultimate questions. But we also pity him because, out of obstinacy and fear, he rejects the love of others and the beauty of the world around him. Exchanging the truth for a lie, he prevents himself from finding any answers to the difficult questions he asks.

Thomas’s questioning has been carried on with the assumption that God needs to prove Himself to us. That was Job’s assumption, and he was wrong. We cannot expect theology and philosophy, bound as they are by human reason, to neatly resolve all intellectual and emotional problems.

Heinrich Heine once wrote, “As soon as religion seeks help from philosophy, its doom is inevitable. Trying to defend itself, it talks its way further and further into its perdition. Like any other absolutism, religion must not justify itself.” Indeed, God will not justify Himself. But, in exploring the conflicts that arise from that faulty assumption, we may learn many things, as we do in the Book of Job, about the seriousness of the struggle for God and the ironic situation of people whose closeness to God is mainly created by the too-insistent questions they ask.

No, this novel is not about the sweetness and light of the Christian faith. But, as its main character points out, “How much stronger, more distinct, more lasting, is the sensation of unhappiness.” Perhaps, by reading this deftly and beautifully written first novel by James Wood, we will prevent Thomas’ failure of imagination from becoming our own.

Garrett Brown is an editor at Tehabi Books in San Diego, California. This article first appeared in Books & Culture magazine. 

When Palestinian Christian Fahed Abu-Akel was elected moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in June last year, he became the first Arab American to head a big US denomination. His one-year term is now over but, as pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, he continues to speak frequently on the need for American Christians to recognise and listen to the Palestinian church.

Abu-Akel was raised in Kuffer-Yassif, a Palestinian village 40 kilometres north-west of Nazareth. His earliest memory is leaving his village — and his mother — in 1948, when war broke out between Arab nations and the newly born Israel.

Todd Hertz, assistant editor of *Christianity Today*, talked with Abu-Akel about his childhood, terrorist actions that fuel the Middle East conflict, and President Bush’s road map to peace.

What was your childhood like?

The key spiritual nurturing for my life was my parent’s love for the Word. They were both Palestinian Arab farmers. Their faith in Jesus Christ was very strong. Before we went to sleep each night my mother would recite [from memory] the Psalms, the Gospels, and other Scripture.

The first thing I remember was the displacement of the Palestinian people. As a four-year-old, I left our home with my father, five sisters, and two brothers. At that age, you are closer to your mother than anyone. So I was searching for her as we left. I finally saw her standing on top of our home’s roof waving her hand. We left her there and went to a neighboring village called Yrka. There we were put in a makeshift Palestinian refugee camp.

Four Palestinian villages next to mine were destroyed. In fact, 400 Palestinian villages — Christian and Muslim — were destroyed by the Israeli military when Israel became a state in 1948. More than 900,000 Palestinian Arab Christians and Muslims became refugees out of these villages and towns.

After several months in the camp, we returned home and my mother was still living in the house. When I grew up, I always wanted to ask my mother why she did not come with us. I finally discovered that it was because her faith was strong. She told my father, “You take the children to protect them, I will stay because this is our home, our land, and our church. If they want to kill me, they will have to kill me as a Christian Palestinian Arab woman.” She refused to leave.

What else influenced you spiritually early on?

Next to my parents, the second biggest spiritual influence on my life was the ministry of two Scottish Presbyterian missionaries. They

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Road map to nowhere

A Presbyterian Palestinian pleads for Middle-East justice.

rented the second floor in our home. My father wanted [my siblings and me] to study English with them. Our daily routine was to learn English, read the Bible, and pray.

Dr Doris Wilson's witness and life as a medical missionary changed the lives of a lot of women in our area who did not want to go to a male doctor. She also changed my life. Through her witness, I felt a call to the ministry to express my commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

When I came to the United States in 1966 to pursue my theological education, I arrived with one suitcase, one Arabic Bible, and one Arab-English dictionary. Thirty-six years later, I was elected to the highest position in the Presbyterian Church, USA. I will always say this will only happen in the church of Jesus Christ and, thank God, in the United States of America.

How do you feel American Christians should approach the conflict in the Holy Land?

At this time of history, we need the evangelical Christian to not only love and support Israel, but to love and support the Palestinians. We need to focus on how these people can see their healing, reconciliation, and forgiving one another as the only salvation for both people.

The least we can do as evangelical Christians is to support co-existence and justice in the name of God. It seems to me that the secular world is a hundred miles ahead of the Christian community on that issue.

Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopal, Catholic, and United Church of Christ congregations all are very clear to focus on the issue of justice for both people. Some evangelicals do not see any rights of Palestinians in Palestine. How can people in the United States look into the eyes of a Palestinian Arab Christian with a church 2000 years old and say, "Because you are a Palestinian, you don't have the right in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and the West Bank?" Unfortunately, an Arab Christian does not exist in the minds of all American Christians.

Why do you feel there is a difference between mainline denominations and evangelicals?

Todd Hertz talks to Fahed Abu-Akel

In our Reformed theology, we see that ancient prophecies have already been fulfilled. The prophets said Israel would return. They came back from Syria and Babylonia, so that prophecy was fulfilled by their return to Palestine. Also, our focus is more on Jesus as fulfilment of all these prophecies.

We are hooked more on to Jesus and his teaching about the Kingdom than to the interpretation that says Israel in 1948 is the fulfillment of prophecy and Jesus is coming tomorrow. That is alien to our Reformed and biblical interpretation of the same Scripture.

What do you see as errors in the Bush road map?

The problem with the road map is the issue of settlements. President Bush talked about outposts. Sharon talked about the outposts. But what they did not acknowledge was that from 1967 to the present, every Israeli Jewish settlement in the East Bank and Gaza is illegal under international law.

The credibility of the United States today hangs on whether the US can do justice for the Palestinians. The first Oslo Accord said that from 1993 to 1999, we would see the end of Israeli settlement and the negotiation of issues concerning water, refuges, borders, and Jerusalem. Hands were shaken and everything was like a honeymoon.

On the ground, however, the opposite took place. More land was stolen, more settlements were built, and the Palestinians came under worse occupation. The Palestinians had more freedom before 1993 than after. From 1967 until now, the Palestinians have been an occupied people with no civil rights, human rights, or eco-

nomics rights.

The other thing that is missing in the peace process is that we are looking at the Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs as equals. The Israeli Jews are occupying the civilian Palestinian Arabs militarily. The first thing we need to say is that occupation must end. In response to the end of occupation, we need the Palestinians to cease their terrorist attacks.

If we are really honest with the road map, three things need to happen:

- 1) Ask the Israeli military occupation to end.
- 2) Ask the Palestinian National Authority to begin the establishment of their state.
- 3) Start building schools, universities, clinics, and businesses.

How do the Palestinians need to change for this to work?

I believe in non-violence, so I would like the Palestinians to adopt non-violent means for their independence. But how can you convince children and youth that cannot go to school? It is difficult to say to an occupied people, "Stop resisting".

Individual Palestinians must cease terrorist attacks, and the Israeli military too must cease their terrorist attack. Both are terrorist attacks. One per cent of the Israelis and one per cent of the Palestinians are torpedoing the hopes of both people. Intelligent politics and good theology says, "I'm not going to let an extremist control the majority." The future of the security of Israel and Palestine depends on the security of each other.

This article first appeared in Christianity Today.

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September 2003

- 21 Preservation of Gospel truth in the planned Protestant Church in the Netherlands to be formed in May 2004 by the union of two Reformed denominations (NHK and GKN) and the Lutheran church.
- 22 Peter (and Anne) Greiner recently inducted to Inverell parish northern NSW including Ashford and Mandowie; (about 250 c&a (communicants and adherents), 75 yf (younger folk – Sunday School and youth) and 16 e (elders) and the now vacant southern NSW parish of Henty with 6 congregations.
- 23 Manly-Lota home mission station eastern Brisbane; with about 60 c&a, 65 yf and 6 e and its long-serving home missionary Des Gallagher and Jean.
- 24 Riverwood-Punchbowl parish, southern Sydney; with about 65 c&a, 40 yf and 5 e. Nello and Narelle Barbieri.
- 25 Bendigo parish, Victoria; with about 75 c&a, 20 yf and 3 e. Andrew and Simone Clarke and its Christian Cinema outreach.
- 26 The week-long Fun and Adventure Camp for high schoolers at Moogerah Dam, Qld starting tomorrow; John Mansfield coordinator.
- 27 Mavis Price APWM / WBT worker from Castlemaine Vic serving in PNG as a literacy facilitator in the Madang province with Pat Lillie.
- 28 Presbytery of Darling Downs Qld; 8 parishes and 10 home mission stations totalling 43 congregations with 1485 c&a; 1 school chaplain, 3 retired ministers, 3 under jurisdiction; David Knott clerk.
- 29 Canterbury parish, Melbourne; with about 120 c&a, 30 yf and 5 e. Grant

and Anne Lawry, and the associated Japanese congregation.

- 30 The production, circulation and impact of the *Australian Presbyterian* and state publications such as *New Directions* (PCQ) and *S.A. Presbyterian News*.

October

- 1 Phillippa Crossan APWM / ECM worker from Ashfield NSW serving among migrants and overseas students and in the European Christian Mission bookshop.
- 2 Berry parish, NSW south coast, with about 65 c&a, 20 yf and 3 e. Wally and Robyn Johnson.
- 3 Les Percy APWM / MERF worker from Brisbane, national coordinator of Middle East Reformed Fellowship which is involved in evangelistic, training and diaconal ministry.
- 4 Wyndham (Werribee) home mission station Vic; with about 30 c&a, 30 yf and 3 e. Roy and Ruth Taylor.
- 5 Scripture Gift Mission with many projects including the production of first Gospel selections in a number of Pacific languages, and scriptures for homeless street kids.
- 6 The Victorian General Assembly – the Moderator (PO), Clerks (Edward Pearson and John Wilson), conveners and all members.
- 7 Brett and Ruth Richardson APWM / ECM workers from Parramatta City church, Sydney serving in Cabra, Spain in a church planting ministry.
- 8 Continuing debates, fellowship and teaching at the Victorian Assembly and wise decisions.
- 9 Presbytery of New England NSW; 4 parishes and 2 home mission stations

totalling 15 congregations with 1035 communicants and adherents.

- 10 The vacant Wagga Wagga parish NSW; with 6 congregations and about 415 c&a, 25 yf and 33 e.
- 11 Robyn Davies APWM / WBT worker from Strathfield NSW serving in PNG with Elizabeth Fritzell in Ramoaina translation and literacy.
- 12 All members and office bearers in Uniting and Anglican churches deeply concerned over practising homosexuals being accepted as ministers or even bishops.
- 13 Callide Valley parish (Biloela and Jambin) Qld; with about 115 c&a, 25 yf and 6 e. Malcolm and Leone Pierce.
- 14 Candidates and teachers involved in theological studies in Perth.
- 15 Glen Waverley parish, Melbourne; with about 25 c&a, 10 yf and 3 e. Trevor and Ann Cox.
- 16 Sandy Wade-Ferrell APWM / OMF worker from Epping NSW serving though English teaching in East Asia.
- 17 Presbytery of Melbourne West; 6 parishes (including Scots Church) and 2 home mission stations totalling 10 congregations with 695 communicants and adherents; 1 tertiary chaplain; Bruce Riding clerk.
- 18 The vacant East Maitland parish near Newcastle NSW including Raymond Terrace and Beresfield; with about 105 c&a, 45 yf and 11 e.
- 19 Bald Hills parish, northern Brisbane; with about 145 c&a, 40 yf and 11 e. Peter and Lesley Bloomfield.
- 20 Botany-Mascot home mission station, Sydney, including a Korean congregation; with about 25 c&a, 10 yf and 2 e. Noah and Sarah Nam.

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Books

Theological Liberalism A Hand Full of Pebbles

Peter Barnes
Lithgow: Covenanter Press, 2003
Reviewed by Peter Hastie

In 1976 Harold Lindsell, the then-editor of *Christianity Today*, dropped a bombshell on the evangelical world by publishing his now-famous *Battle for the Bible*. One of his most famous claims was that the “doctrine of limited inerrancy was not a platform but a slope” and that those who assumed this position were destined to far greater theological compromise.

Peter Barnes’s survey of theological liberalism in the 19th and 20th centuries bears out the historical reality of Lindsell’s assertion. Although this is a relatively short work in 42 pages, it is a masterful summary of the last two centuries of church history in the light of the Bible’s warnings about the constant danger of false prophecy.

One of the repeated refrains in both Old and New Testaments concerns the threat of false teaching. It is the subject of dire warnings by apostles and prophets alike. As Barnes points out, one of the defining characteristics of many modern false prophets is their unwillingness to concede elements of supernaturalism in the Bible. This is one of the hallmarks of liberalism.

I only wish I had gone to theological college with a copy of *Theological Liberalism* in my hand. It is like a pocket-sized map of a vast city which lays out all the main routes and areas of the subject in an easy-to-understand manner. It covers most of the big names in theological scholarship during the last 150 years and identifies where they went wrong in a very precise, and at times humorous, manner.

Unlike other books of scholarship it is also peppered with lots of sage advice and witty one-liners. How Dr Barnes has managed to read so many people, distill the essence of their teaching and dismiss their errors so capably is quite remarkable. It is an excellent book.

Peter Hastie is issues editor of AP. Peter Barnes is books editor of AP.

Walking Away from Faith

Ruth Tucker
Illinois: IVP, 2002.
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

Christians tend to write about unbelievers coming to faith in Christ rather than professing believers walking away from the faith. Ruth Tucker, who revels in portraying herself as one who struggles with doubts, deals with an interesting collection of such types – including Charles Templeton (who used to work with Billy

Graham) and Robert Pearsall Smith (husband of Hannah Whitall Smith).

Others are more complex. Sergei Bulgakov lost his faith while he was studying in the seminary, embraced Marxism, but later returned to Russian Orthodoxy. Marcus Borg went from evangelicalism to unbelief to liberalism (assuming that there is any discernible difference between the latter two). David Dean denounced Christianity as “a religion of false hopes and lies” as he took to a homosexual lifestyle, then “returned” to espouse “a loving God who accepts me”.

There are some helpful accounts here, but the analysis is somewhat lacking. Ruth Tucker leans over too far in trying to understand why people reject Christ. She even comments that she has never met an atheist she didn’t like. One wonders how many she has met. This is a good idea for a book, but a sharper mind than Ruth Tucker’s is needed to carry out the project. She is simply not sceptical enough about the sceptics.

Peter Barnes is books editor of AP.



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State of immorality

Without morality, democracy is simply the broad way to destruction.

So much of life seems to consist of unspoken assumptions. One that we tend to imbibe with our mother's milk is the notion that democracy is inherently Christian, and that Christianity is expressed in democracy. Both are often seen as "right" by Christians – whatever that may mean exactly.

Before we unthinkingly identify the Christian message with the vagaries of modern democracies, let us consider a few points.

First, righteousness means more than majority opinion. The biblical perspective is that "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34). The Christian will never maintain that the 51 per cent get the last say. It is, after all, the broad way, with most people on it, that leads to destruction (Matt.7:13-14).

Every century or so, God sends along a sociologist with something sensible and worthwhile to say. In the 20th century it was Peter Berger; in the 19th century it was Alexis de Tocqueville. In the 1830s the sharp and reflective mind of de Tocqueville turned to consider the United States of America.

Having visited the place and observed it at first hand, he concluded that "there is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America". Unlike in France, and Europe generally, the cause of freedom and of religion seemed to go together in America.

De Tocqueville, however, was perceptive enough to ask the question: "How is it possible that society should escape destruction if the moral tie is not strengthened in proportion as the political tie is relaxed?"

Freedom is a wonderful thing, but freedom without righteousness is a race down the Gadarene slope. John Witherspoon (1723-94) was the only clergyman – and a Presbyterian one at that – to sign the Declaration of Independence in 1783. Yet he too realised that independence is not of itself a doorway to paradise. He warned that "A republic once equally poised must either preserve its



Peter Barnes

virtue or lose its liberty".

As Calvin concluded his *Institutes*, he asserted: "The Lord, therefore, is the King of Kings, who, when He has opened His sacred mouth, must alone be heard, before all and above all men; next to him we are subject to those men who are in authority over us, but only in Him."

No system – whether democratic, aristocratic, monarchical or dictatorial – can usurp the rightful claim of Jesus to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Second, Christian realism takes the Fall seriously. There are many democrats who believe in majority rule because they believe in humanity rather than in God. However, the Christian will not defend democracy on those grounds.

Rather, he might say with C. S. Lewis: "I am a democrat because I believe in the Fall of Man."

Because of the universality of sin – "none is righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10) – it is appropriate not to give any one person too much power. A system of checks and balances can be cumbersome, but it also has considerable benefits in a fallen world. At any rate, the alternatives are likely to be worse.

The Stuart kings of the 17th century put forward the notion of the divine right of kings. It is true that kings can rule rightly, but their law is not the same as God's law. Because we are all prone to selfishness, megalomania, paranoia, egotism, and other evils, it is arguable that not all legislative, executive, and judicial power should reside in one man.

Human beings are not perfectible in this life, but they are corruptible. The Fall needs to be taken very seriously, or our utopia

may soon resemble the Gulag Archipelago.

Third, there are dangers in modern democracies. Even in the 1830s Alexis de Tocqueville could see some worrying trends, and issued a warning: "In our time the nations cannot choose social inequality; but it depends on them whether equality shall conduct them to servitude or to liberty, to civilisation or to barbarism, to prosperity or to wretchedness."

He added that "Americans are so enamored of equality they would rather be equal in slavery than unequal in freedom".

In NSW recently the democratic appeal to equality has meant that 16-year-olds are now free to join in the Sleaze Ball.

Yet the West dreams on that it only needs to plant democracies all over the globe for the world to be a better place. If only Iraq was blessed with something like what goes on in Macquarie Street! And if only it had newspapers and television stations run by the likes of Packer or Murdoch!

In my view, it is fanciful to think that the problems of the Middle East will be solved by imposing democracy on the region. Islam is a religion which demands obedience to Islamic civil law, and as such is inherently anti-democratic. To the debased West, bereft of its Christian foundations, democracy means the right of homosexuals to flaunt themselves through Oxford Street whenever they feel like it and to flood our television sets with junk and/or pornography. It is not altogether surprising some Muslims are not overly keen on the idea.

Democracy without a basis in righteousness can descend into demagoguery, debauchery and dictatorship. In fact, Western democracies are becoming increasingly chaotic and coercive at the same time. Freedom and order are losing their Christian meanings. To survive, democracy requires two things: moral goodness and moral realism. Those two things are not found in vast quantities in Europe, North America or Australia at the moment.

Peter Barnes is minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, Sydney. 