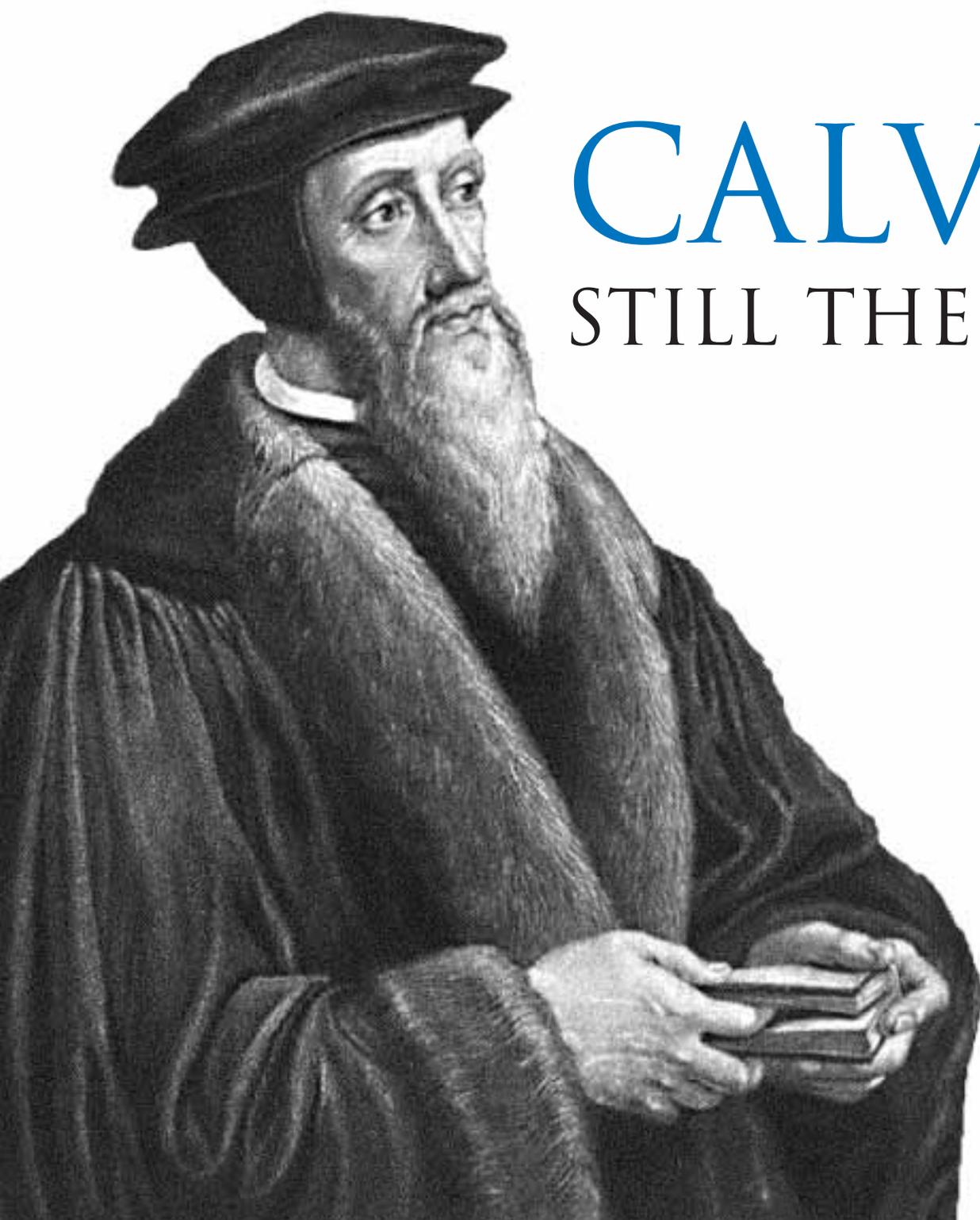


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CALVIN STILL THE ONE?

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editorial

John Calvin deservedly holds one of the highest reputations as a theologian of the Christian church. John Donne once wrote admiringly of him: "St Augustine hath scarce been equalled by any of all the writers in the Church of God except Calvin." Even detractors stand in awe of him.

The marks of Calvin's influence in the modern world are many and varied. His biblical commentaries and theological ideas have fuelled the spread of Protestantism and the Christian missionary effort. His understanding of the biblical doctrines of man and sin became the ideological soil in which western political theories of representative government and democracy have flourished. His teachings on vocation and culture have done much to shape commercial enterprise throughout the free world. And yet for all this, Calvin remains largely misunderstood.

It is particularly disappointing, given the enormous breadth of contemporary Calvin scholarship, to hear reputable historians such as Paul Johnson refer disparagingly to Calvin as a Renaissance equivalent of Lenin in terms of his self-righteousness, love of power, intolerance and ferocity towards the infidel. One also grows weary of hearing the ill-informed accusations of those who claim that the central feature of Calvin's theology was a rigidly deterministic view of predestination, or that his doctrine of sin insisted that every man was as thoroughly wicked as he could be. Again, it is not uncommon to hear Christians say that Calvinism is somehow opposed to evangelism or that it severs the nerve of missionary endeavour. How these thoughts square with the fact that Calvin devoted his life to spreading the gospel throughout Europe is never quite satisfactorily explained.

However, perhaps even more disturbing than caricatures of Calvin by his enemies are the misrepresentations of Calvin's teaching by his so-called friends. During the past 50 years it has become fashionable for some Calvin scholars to set Calvin against his successors, especially the Puritans, and claim that they corrupted his theology. That's why *Australian Presbyterian* is pleased to interview the British philosopher, Professor Paul Helm, author of *John Calvin's Ideas*, to expose some of the modern misconceptions about Calvin.

Peter Hastie ^{ap}

The real Calvin

Philosopher, theologian, genius – and a man of his times.



Professor Paul Helm held the J.I. Packer Chair in Theology and Philosophy at Regent College, Vancouver, Canada from 2001 to 2004. Before that, he was Professor of the History and Philosophy of Religion at King's College in the University of London. Before joining King's College in 1993, he was Reader in Philosophy at the University of Liverpool. Educated in Worcester College, Oxford, Professor Helm has written many articles and books, mainly focusing on the philosophy of religion and Christian doctrine in the Reformed tradition. He is married and has five children. Among his many books are: *The Providence of God*; *Eternal God*; *Faith with Reason*; *Faith and Understanding*; *Calvin and the Calvinists*; *The Beginnings*; *The Callings*; *The Last Things* and his most recent major work, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford University Press 2004). Peter Hastie spoke to Professor Helm in Vancouver recently.

Why does a professor of philosophy write books on a theologian such as John Calvin rather than a renowned



**Paul Helm
talks to
Peter Hastie**

Christian philosopher like Thomas Aquinas?

Actually, there are a number of reasons for my interest in Calvin. When I wrote my first book on Calvin, *Calvin and the Calvinists*, I was responding to a book by Dr R.T. Kendall, later a well-known minister in London, in which he suggested that Calvin's so-called theological "successors" in the period after the Reformation misrepresented many of his positions and introduced a number of corruptions into the brand of theology which has come to be associated with Calvin's name.

My own view, which I still hold, was that R.T. Kendall had done a poor job in trying to distinguish between Calvin and the Calvinistic tradition. In fact, his book undermined the Calvinistic tradition, which is the tradition out of which I come. So I became rather alarmed at the

thought that the tradition that we have associated with John Calvin was being "trashed" for what I considered to be rather flimsy and superficial reasons. So *Calvin and the Calvinists* was a response to R.T. Kendall's book and nothing more.

However, in my latest book on Calvin, *John Calvin's Ideas* (OUP), I am seeking to do something rather different. I think we can learn from him about how to think and how to engage in theology and philosophy. I am particularly interested as a professional philosopher in Calvin's approach to gaining knowledge and establishing truth.

Calvin has a lot to teach Christian philosophers of today about our attitude to knowledge. One of the most pleasing developments over the last few decades has been the rise in interest in what is now called "Christian" philosophy. We have seen a renaissance of Christians who are interested in philosophy. This has been a very encouraging phenomenon, but it has had a glaring deficiency. Parts of the movement are not as theologically aware or informed as they could be. Unfortunately, this has affected the qual-

ity of work that some of these Christian philosophers have undertaken when they write on the philosophy of religion. If some of them had a better appreciation of Calvin, as well as other theological “greats”, I dare say that they would have probably produced more useful philosophy.

How does an understanding of Calvin’s views about knowledge help them?

Calvin spoke about a distinction between God as He is in Himself, that is, His essence, and God as He is revealed towards us, in other words, His nature. In Book 1 of the *Institutes* he says: “What is God? Men who pose this question are merely toying with idle speculations. It is far better for us to inquire ‘What is His nature?’ and to know what is consistent with His nature... Indeed His essence is incomprehensible; hence His divineness far escapes all human perception. But upon his individual works He has engraved unmistakable marks of his glory.”

Here Calvin makes a rather nuanced distinction between God’s *nature* and God’s *essence*. He believes while we cannot properly understand God’s essence – it is, in a sense, incomprehensible – we can know His nature which is revealed to us. Of course, Calvin isn’t saying that since God’s essence is incomprehensible we can’t know anything about it. We can know what has been revealed to us, thus giving an insight into the character of God’s nature, from which we can then go on to draw some conclusions about his essence. But the essence of God has not been revealed to us. For God to fully impart Himself to us would require us to be divine. This means that there is no name or concept that fully encompasses God. Nor is there any description of God that fully defines Him. We cannot explain God completely with our own thoughts, imagination or language.

If philosophers fully understood this they would recognise more acutely than they do the limits of human reason to comprehend God and His ways. Calvin reminds us that we must be constantly aware of the presence of mystery in the Christian faith. He also helps us to see why the mystery is there. He seeks to preserve and protect that mystery and, in a sense, not allow it to be trampled on by the philosophical intellect. Calvin believes that God’s incomprehensibility warns us against unwarranted speculation in theology, and about trusting human analogies

of the divine. So, I believe Calvin is enormously helpful in getting us started on the right foot as we try to think philosophically. And, as I said before, knowing Calvin thoroughly is essential to understanding and safeguarding the Reformed tradition.

I think many people who will read your latest book, *John Calvin’s Ideas*, will say that it’s a groundbreaking book because it’s looking at Calvin’s intellectual and philosophical roots. Did you have a specific reason that led you and Oxford University Press to publish it?

I wanted to clear up a number of modern misconceptions about Calvin. One of the misconceptions held by many Christians today about Calvin is that they think he is a purely biblical thinker – he had no real interaction with or knowledge of philosophy. They think he was born in the heavens, as it were, and was untouched and unaffected by medieval philosophy. But I think I have demonstrated in my book that Calvin was a child of the medieval period. A thorough reading of Calvin’s works shows that he was also affected by the Renaissance and was very familiar with a whole range of theological and philosophical positions.

Throughout my book I use the Roman Catholic theologian and philosopher Thomas Aquinas as a kind of foil for Calvin. I am not suggesting, incidentally, that Thomas Aquinas directly influenced Calvin. But someone or something that has Aquinas’s intellectual “shape” certainly did. The interesting thing is that on a number of important issues the positions that he and Thomas adopt marry up with each other. So that’s one reason why I am so interested in Calvin. I think it’s important to understand his theological method as well as his view of knowledge and to discover who his theological and philosophical predecessors were.

The other major reason why I am so interested in Calvin, especially his understanding of how and what we know about God, is that in some branches of contemporary Christian philosophy Calvin is viewed as a supporter of what is known as

“reformed epistemology”. Reformed epistemology is the name we give to a branch of philosophy that is concerned with religious knowledge and how we can establish certain religious truth-claims. Those who believe in reformed epistemology challenge the idea that all beliefs, other than those which are allegedly self-evident, must be supported by evidence to be fully rational. Reformed epistemologists think that it’s perfectly reasonable, for instance, for a person to believe many things without having evidence to support their beliefs. Most strikingly, they insist that believing in God does not need the support of evidence or argument in order for it to be rational.

Famous contemporary philosophers like Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, who are coming out of a Calvinist tradition, have tried to find precedent for what they believe in Calvin. They claim that if Calvin is right in thinking that people are born with an innate sense of God, then we can rationally come to belief in God without the need for supporting evidence. Personally, I am not convinced that they are entitled to draw all these conclusions from Calvin, and so I evaluate their ideas about Calvin as part of my book.

In your latest book you say very little about John Calvin’s views on predestination. Yet popular historians and other scholars often identify his views on predestination as the central plank in his theology. Why haven’t you used that as the defining point of Calvin?

I haven’t focused on Calvin’s doctrine of predestination because I believe it’s a wrong reading of Calvin to want to identify in his thought a central dogma from which all other theological positions can be deduced or derived. Instead, I have tried to show that there were actually many ideas in Calvin’s head besides the idea of predestination. Though I don’t deal with predestination in the book, I should point out that there’s a chapter on the closely aligned subject of providence.

I think the other thing that I’d say is that Calvin’s views on predestination and election are hardly unique to him. Unfortunately, in the popular mind Calvin is the author of the doctrines of predestination and election. The reality is somewhat different. The fact is that we find very similar views to Calvin’s in Augustine and, to a lesser degree, but definitely to a considerable degree, in

If philosophers fully understood this, they would recognise more acutely the limits of human reason to comprehend God.

Thomas Aquinas.

It's often said that Calvin has little in common with earlier theologians. Is that an accurate view?

No, not really. Calvin certainly brings a freshness of style to theological writing. Clearly he is one of the founders, if that's the right word, of the modern French language. He's enormously important in that sense. And he certainly had prodigious, unique Renaissance-cultivated literary gifts. You certainly find these in *The Institutes*, for example, where Calvin constructs his work in the second person rather than the third person. Sometimes he even writes in the first person. So, in one sense, he is rather unique in terms of his style – his language is elegant, economical, graceful and un-scholastic.

However, even recognising that Calvin brings his very own style to theological writing, we should not be blind to the signs of scholastic influence in both *The Institutes* and a number of other works. For instance he employs the medieval *disputatio* tradition. This is a mode of exposition in which the question for discussion is raised, then authorities are advanced in support of and also in opposition to the proposition to be discussed, and then some reasoned judgment. I think this demonstrates that Calvin was a man of his times who worked within the conventions of his age.

This brings me to the claim, sometimes heard, that Calvin is so unique that he seems to come from another world. My own view is that lots of people have tried to appropriate Calvin for their own theological and political agendas. A modern example of just this sort of thing is the controversy that arose in Europe between Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, both leading Protestant theologians at the time of the Second World War. Barth and Brunner quarrelled over whether Calvin was or was not a natural theologian. One of the reasons for the intensity of this debate was that Barth was trying to enlist Calvin to support him in his stance against the "German Christian" movement (a creature of the Nazi party) in the early years of the Third Reich. The German Christian movement sought justification for its teachings from so-called natural theology. I think this particular controversy is a reminder that we should always be wary of anachronism in appropriating ideas from the past to the present.

To what extent was Calvin indebted to his medieval predecessors?

It's interesting that Calvin was educated in philosophy and in law but not in theology. He picked up theology, so to speak. I think it's impossible to deny he was influenced by his educational background.

I find it interesting when people say that Calvin has an anti-speculative, anti-scholastic frame of mind. There's considerable evidence that he's anti-speculative, but a lot less evidence that he's anti-scholastic. When he inveighs against the scholastics he has very specific people in mind, namely, his contemporaries at the Sorbonne (University of Paris) who were ardently obstructing the Reformation. In other places he simply deals with his

Calvin freely appropriated scholastic distinctions and terminology when he thought these would further his argument.



scholastic inheritance either by accepting or rejecting its various insights, based on whether he thought they were good and useful in fostering the Reformation project. So, almost on the same page, you can find an instance of Calvin praising Aristotle on some particular issue, and then, a short while later, critiquing him for some other matter. Again, sometimes he applauds the scholastics in general for some useful distinction they have made, and then soon afterwards he rejects their vague and useless speculations. So he's totally familiar with the range of material he is working with. He was the master of it and was prepared to use it or not as he saw fit.

Over the past 50 years it's been popular to pit Calvin's followers like Beza, William Perkins and the Westminster divines against Calvin himself. Is there any substance to these claims?

I myself believe there's very little substance to their claims. There is a certainly a difference in method that we find among Calvin's followers. And we also see a strong reassertion after Calvin of scholastic methods within the Reformed tradition. Reformed scholars like Professor Richard Muller argue – quite plausibly, I think – that this simply reflects the fact that once the Protestant Church

was faced with the Counter-Reformation, the Reformed community had to set about training their own ministers.

This meant that they were suddenly forced to reflect upon a whole range of matters which had not been dealt with at an earlier stage of the Reformation. *The Institutes*, for all its greatness as a work in systematic theology, is, after all, essentially an occasional book. Calvin does not give equal weight in that book to every aspect of the theological curriculum. He deliberately emphasized certain matters at the expense of others, partly because some of these matters could be taken for granted, and partly because of the need to debate the issues which lay at the heart of the Reformation conflict.

The simple fact is that when you come to educating young men for the Christian ministry, then you have to adopt a much more formalised method of instruction. Educators such as Francis Turretin deliberately reverted to the scholastic method of teaching to ensure that students were thoroughly prepared on all issues. As it has become clear from my own studies of Calvin, this move wasn't altogether outside of the spirit that we find in Calvin's work itself. After all, as I have already mentioned, Calvin freely appropriated scholastic distinctions and terminology when he thought that these would further the thoughts of his argument in *The Institutes*.

Why do you think scholars try to drive a wedge between Calvin and his Reformed successors?

I think they want to think of Calvin as a kind of re-discoverer of the pure gospel. They have a rather simplistic "heroes and villains" view of church history. Calvin is their hero. Therefore, in their judgment, he mustn't be tainted with anything that seems unheroic or unimpressive. They caricature, quite unfairly, the movement that follows Calvin as a kind of degeneration into legalism. This is one of the main charges that they level against the theology of Calvin's successors. Another charge is that his followers taught preparationism, that is, the teaching that Christian conversion must always be preceded by the preaching of the law.

I think we can find sporadic evidence of these things, depending, of course, on what the critics mean by legalism and preparationism. But the simple fact is that Calvin assigned a significant role to the law, and while he didn't explore it as fully as his successors, nevertheless he stands at the head of the Reformed tradition. It is a

serious misreading of Calvin to think that he was opposed to it.

What are some of the novel ideas about Calvin that Kendall and others have advanced? Why have you engaged them in fairly extensive controversy?

Well, the areas that concern me relate to doctrinal matters that are central to our understanding of the Gospel. These issues arose after Calvin's death, as Reformed theologians were forced to reflect further on the pastoral implications of the Gospel. One area of particular importance has to do with the nature of the atonement. In the early 17th century Arminius, the Dutch theologian, began to teach that Christ died on behalf of all men. This raised the question: for whom did Christ die? Did he die for all people or just for the elect?

The Reformed community defended the view that Christ's death was to save his people from their sin – it was a definite atonement. Now Dr Kendall and others have been arguing that the idea of definite atonement is a serious departure from Calvin. What I strove to say in my little book, *Calvin and the Calvinists*, was that the doctrine of definite atonement is consistent with what Calvin taught. Further, the doctrine of definite atonement may be said to be implied by what Calvin taught on the substitutionary nature of the atonement. The problem, of course, is that Calvin was never forced to defend a definite view of the atonement. The issue, as a controversy on which he was required to take sides, simply hadn't come up by the time of his death.

Do you see any significant break between Calvin and the Puritans? Were there genuine differences?

Naturally there were many differences, as one would expect. The Puritans came almost a century later and were operating in a different culture and political context. However, despite the existence of such differences, I think it is important to point out that they were largely matters of style and emphasis rather than matters of substance.

Is there any basis to the oft-repeated claim that Calvin was warm, exuberant and evangelical in his understanding of the Gospel and the Westminster divines were formal, introspective and legalistic?

I really don't think so. The writings of the Westminster divines and the pastoral

theology of the Puritan period reveals a deep spiritual sensitivity and warmth of piety. In any age you will find instances of arid theology, but for the most part the Puritans certainly were concerned for heart-religion.

The problem with these sorts of claims is that they are made quite recklessly. When scholars say that Westminster theology is infected with legalism, rationalism, Aristotelianism, formalism and the like – they usually use these terms in such imprecise ways that it's hard to know what they mean and to what these terms apply. Unfortunately most of the charges come down to nothing more than "theological slang". It is regrettable that these charges against Westminster theology are a dust storm that does nothing to clarify our vision of the field.

Kendall claims that Calvin taught universal atonement, that is, that Christ died for all, and the doctrine of definite atonement is a Westminster aberration. Is there any justification for that view?

If Kendall's view is meant to imply that Calvin denied in express terms the limited or definite view of the atonement, then the answer is that there is no justification for it. If we ask the question: did Calvin expressly teach the doctrine of definite atonement, then it's hard to say. Of course, we must always be on our guard against inaccuracies in attributing to earlier writers views that have only been developed in subsequent periods. We must be honest and admit that Calvin did not engage in any such controversy over the atonement. However, I think it's reasonable to suggest that Calvin's views of the atonement as substitutionary and efficacious lead naturally into the doctrine of definite atonement. The seeds of definite atonement are definitely there. When people like Dr Kendall point to the universal terms in which Calvin's language is cast, I think it can be readily shown that this really refers to the universal preaching of the gospel without restriction or condition to men and women everywhere.

Kendall seems to suggest that the Westminster divines turned saving faith into a work whereas Calvin had

always seen it as a gift. Is he correct in saying that?

No, he is not. Both the Westminster divines and Calvin teach that faith is a gift from God. Interestingly, this is a point where Calvin has recourse to Aristotelian philosophy to make his position clear. He repeatedly refers to faith as the instrumental cause of justification. In this sense, faith is not the material cause or ground of justification; it is simply the instrument that appropriates the benefits of Christ's death to the individual believer. This means that there is a certain element of conditionality about faith. Without faith, there is no salvation. But this does not mean in Calvin's mind, or in the minds of the Westminster divines, that faith is therefore the meritorious cause of justification. Such an idea would fill both of them with horror since it would have the effect of dethroning Christ from his office as the sole mediator between God and man.

Kendall also suggests that the Westminster divines undermine Calvin's teaching that every Christian should be fully assured of his or her salvation. Is this true?

I think it's important to approach Calvin's work on faith with a distinction in mind, that is, that he distinguished between faith in its ideal form and faith as one frequently finds it empirically in the hearts and lives of Christians. The ideal view of faith for Calvin in *The Institutes* is the faith which carries assurance with it. On either side of where that definition occurs in *The Institutes*, he frequently shows that faith can be mixed with doubt and unbelief which issues in a lack of assurance on the part of the person who has it.

What are the pastoral consequences of denying definite atonement and claiming that faith is essentially a passive intellectual persuasion rather than an active exercise in thought?

If Christians understand the pastoral

These charges against Western theology are a dust storm that does nothing to clarify our vision.

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consequences of denying definite atonement they will realise that they are pretty serious. It would mean that Christ's work was so presented that it had to have some kind of a human contribution to make it effective. If Christ died with the intent of saving the whole world and, clearly, the whole world is not saved, then the efficacy and merit of Christ's atonement cannot ensure the salvation of a single soul. I find it hard to imagine a doctrine that would do more to undermine the finality and sufficiency of the atonement than that.

As far as the nature of faith is concerned, it is more than simple agreement with a proposition. James tells us that even the devil has that sort of faith (James 2:19) The presence of true biblical faith can be seen through the effects of such faith in our lives. Faith is known by its fruits, as the New Testament teaches, so it is by an appreciation of these fruits in our lives that faith should be recognised. That does not mean that these fruits (the evidence of such faith) supplant faith or supplant the work of Christ, which is a widespread misunderstanding on the part of many interpreters of Calvin. It is through seeing the fruits of faith that we gain assurance of the reality of our faith in the Redeemer. However, and I want to stress this point, these fruits are not the ground of our acceptance with God. The ground of our justification is the righteousness of Christ.

What is it about Calvin's understanding of God, especially his understanding of God's incomprehensibility, that people in the 21st century so desperately need to hear?

The term "incomprehensibility" is a little unfortunate. To people today it might suggest that all thinking about God is mumbo jumbo. Again, it might suggest a view of God in which anything goes. Some might reason that because God is incomprehensible each one is entitled to make up a view of God to suit him or herself.

For Calvin and his successors the incomprehensibility of God is a technical term, a term of art. It simply denotes the idea that it is impossible for us to get our minds around the infinitude and glory of God. The Creator/creature distinction is absolutely fundamental to Calvin's theology. From this he reasons that we cannot fit God into the sort of categories that we use to describe and understand aspects of created reality.

The reason, then, why the doctrine of God's incomprehensibility is so important is that it is all too easy for us to devise a god whose character is made in our own image. What Calvin stresses, with all

Calvin is not a revolutionary; he is a reformer.

those who have followed him, is that the distinction between the Creator and the creature lays the foundation for our relationship with God and the

limitations of our knowledge. God's thoughts will always be beyond human ones. We are limited by our creatureliness.

Some philosophers suggest that human language is too weak and limited to speak usefully about God. Since Calvin had a very big view of God, did he have difficulty with God-talk, and were human words inadequate as far as he was concerned?

Calvin's view on human language is very interesting; he sees the whole process of divine revelation as being part and parcel of God's grace. When God reveals Himself to us He is revealing the good news of His grace and mercy. When God does this, He comes down to our level by accommodating Himself to human thought-patterns and forms of speech. In other words, God accommodates Himself to our own time-bound and space-bound condition. That's an act of condescension and grace for Calvin. God's accommodation to us when He speaks is paralleled in the incarnation which itself is an act of condescension and grace. Obviously, human words can never fully encapsulate the grandeur and glory of God. But that does not mean that language is inadequate for the tasks that it has to perform. It is certainly adequate as a vehicle of communication. But that does not mean that it is exhaustive. We can never by our human language encompass God's majesty and wisdom.

Calvin taught that everyone has an innate knowledge of God. Does this

mean that Calvin is opposed to the traditional proofs of the existence of God as well as the use of reason in apologetics as some Calvinists have suggested?

I believe that Calvin thought that the *sensus divinitatis* (innate sense of God) as he taught it (Romans 1:19) is itself an aspect of natural revelation. In other words, it's one of the pieces of evidence in the created order that demonstrates (perhaps in a dramatic rather than an argumentative fashion) that God exists. Calvin doesn't think that being a believer is simply a blind leap of faith or a mere act of the will. Our belief in God may be based on various lines of evidence which together make such a belief plausible. Some of those grounds for believing in God are the evidence of God's wisdom, power and glory as revealed in the creation. And it's interesting to see how this works out, for example, in his commentary on Acts 17 where he deals with Paul at the Areopagus. Calvin sees Paul's preaching as following a fairly clear pattern which presupposes some natural revelation as part of that pattern. People need to remember in this connection that not everything in the Reformation period was brought into question. Calvin was not a revolutionary; he was a reformer. I am not convinced that the doctrine of natural revelation was an issue at the time of the Reformation. It would be foolish to expect Calvin to have as much to say on it as he does, for example, on the nature of human merit.

Do you have any advice to people on how to read *The Institutes*?

My rather unoriginal advice is to begin at the beginning and to pay particular attention to the first three books, paying less attention to book four. The other thing that I would say is to read patiently. Remember that *The Institutes* was a much revised, central text for Calvin. *The Institutes* represent the key to properly understanding Calvin's essential thought as well as providing the theological background to his commentaries. So it's a key Calvin text that must be read slowly and carefully.

Further, we need to remember, as we noted earlier, that *The Institutes* is not a theological textbook in the modern sense of the term. For instance, Calvin does not give equal treatment to every topic. And because it is an "existential" work, addressing the whole man, it continually challenges the reader. It's a Reformation classic, one of the "great books" of the Christian faith,

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A torrent of error

Closing the gulf between Calvin and Calvinism.

The word “covenant” occurs about 300 times in Scripture, but only in the 17th century did covenant theology (also known as federal theology) really come to the fore. Covenant theology teaches that God made a covenant of works with Adam, but he broke it. Since then, all humanity has entered the world under a covenant of works which we are unable to keep. In His grace, God the Father has through the covenant of redemption with His Son set apart a people for Himself in the covenant of grace. All of God’s redeemed elect from all ages are saved in the same way – by faith in God’s gracious promises fulfilled in Christ Jesus.

Today, it has become fashionable in many circles to see a great gulf between Calvin and Calvinism. That was the view of Karl Barth, and it has been perpetuated with regard to English Calvinism by R. T. Kendall, and with regard to Scottish Calvinism by the two scholarly brothers, J. B. and T. F. Torrance. The Torrances have seen 17th century covenant theology, as exemplified in the Westminster Confession of Faith, as being very different from the theology set forth by Calvin in his *Institutes*. Accordingly, they have accused covenant theology of many serious misdemeanors:

1. Stale and harsh dogmatism.

According to Thomas Torrance, “The Confession of Faith does not manifest the spiritual freshness and freedom, or the evangelical joy, of the Scots Confession of 1560, and was not so much a ‘Confession’ as a rational explanation of Protestant theology composed in fulfilment of a constitutional establishment, reflecting the rigid dogmatism of the Synod of Dort, 1618.”

He maintains that Calvin’s view of the covenant was “radically altered” through being systematised and schematised, in order to conform to “a framework of law and grace governed by a severely contractual notion of covenant”. The results were little short of being spiritually disastrous – the Christian life was moralised; faith was intellectualised; and theology was logicalised. In place of God who is love, we find in Scottish theology “a rather harsh view of God”. The sweet-



Peter Barnes

ness and light of the 16th century apparently all dissolved into misery and bondage in the 17th.

2. Teaching a covenant of works in Adam.

J. B. Torrance writes: “This distinction between a Covenant of Works and a Covenant of Grace was unknown to Calvin and the Reformers – nor indeed would Calvin have ever taught it.” He thought that this gave priority to law over grace since it would mean that the law was given to Adam before the promise was given to Abraham. It is difficult to follow the logic of this. The fact that the animals were created before human beings says nothing about their priority or importance.

This has implications for the use of the law in seeking to obtain a conviction of sin in order that the sinner might be led to Christ. On the Torrance view, that is neither desirable nor possible since there is no covenant of works. T. F. Torrance maintains that in the New Testament it is the Gospel, not the law, which reveals both the real depth of sin and the universal depravity of unregenerate human nature.

3. Basing assurance on subjective self-examination, and not on Christ’s objective work.

Thomas Torrance makes the quite extraordinary charge that The Sum of Saving Knowledge (Westminster Confession) gave rise to “a rather moralistic and indeed a semi-pelagian understanding of the Gospel”. The language of the market-place and of a legal compact is supposed to have replaced the language of

the Bible. It is James B. Torrance’s contention that a covenant is unconditional whereas a contract is not.

In the Torrance school, it is often contended that the Reformers equated faith with assurance, while their successors did not. The biblical teaching on assurance is not as straightforward as the Torrances maintain. Boston cites Rutherford to the effect that there are two types of assurance – one of which is part of saving faith and one which follows saving faith. The first kind is direct, the second is a reflex act of the soul.

Rutherford pointed to the need to add to faith in giving assurance by citing 2 Peter 1:10 – a verse which was often cited by federal theologians. The Torrances miss the biblical point that obedience, rightly understood, is meant to increase assurance (2 Pet. 1:5-7, 10; 1 John 2:3, 5). Hence Colquhoun warned: “Without the diligent performance of good works, no believer can attain assurance of his personal interest in eternal salvation, far less establishment in that assurance.”

The Torrance criticisms come from trying to reduce the biblical message to a few simple slogans. The federal theologians sought to walk the narrow way between the twin evils of legalism and antinomianism. Samuel Rutherford maintained that “a believing faith must be a working faith”. Nevertheless, “faith” was not understood simply as mental assent to the doctrines of the gospel.

Because of such a view of saving faith, Thomas Torrance thinks that, so far as assurance is concerned, in The Sum of Saving Knowledge, believers were “in the last analysis thrown back upon themselves”. He refers to what he calls the “new moralism” of the *Larger Catechism*. Justification by faith came, in effect, to mean justification by faith and obedience. At least, that is Torrance’s accusation. But the federal theologians were only echoing what Calvin himself believed, that “believers are taught to examine themselves carefully and humbly, lest the confidence of the flesh creep in and replace assurance of faith”.

The Torrances try to separate justification from sanctification in a way that fed-

The Torrances try to separate justification from sanctification.

eral theology – and the Bible for that matter – does not. To cite Thomas Boston: “Justification and sanctification are indeed inseparable. In vain do they pretend to be justified who are not sanctified; and in vain do they fear they are not justified, who are sanctified by the Spirit of Christ, 1 Cor. 6:11. But yet they are distinct benefits, not to be confounded, nor taken for one and the same.”

The federal theologians were aware of the dangers of using fruit as the evidence of saving faith. Horatius Bonar declared: “We need *sensitive* but not *morbid* consciences to keep us steadfast in the faith.” For true assurance, Hugh Binning advised two things: studying the promises of Christ, and taking heed to walk suitably. John Colquhoun also pointed to both objective and subjective grounds for the believer’s assurance – do you cordially believe the doctrines of the glorious gospel, love this gospel, and in some measure delight in the law of God after the inward man?

4. Teaching limited atonement.

The *Larger Catechism* maintains that “Redemption is certainly applied, and effectually communicated, to all those for whom Christ has purchased it” (Q. 59). This is the teaching too of David Dickson, and indeed virtually all of the federal theologians. To John McLeod Campbell, this was an arbitrary act, which could not reveal the character of God, which is love.

All of the criticisms of federal theology by the Torrances are intertwined. Hence the charge that lack of assurance came from the doctrine of limited atonement. In the Torrance view – whether T. F. or J. B. – Calvin taught that Christ died for all men, and this was also taught by the Scots theologians of the 16th century. By the 17th century this was replaced by the notion of definite or limited atonement, which, in T. F. Torrance’s view, has done “immense damage in Scottish theology”.

In fact, the Torrance view that Christ

dies for all but does not save all hardly makes for assurance. If Christ’s death is not sufficient for the salvation of the sinner, the objective ground for assurance is undermined – contrary to Torrance’s intention. In any case, the federal theologians did not ground their assurance immediately on their grasp of election but worked back from their coming to Christ. Hence George Hutcheson wrote, with regard to John 6:37: “Such as really come to Christ and embrace Him have not only the present comfort of communion with him, but are warranted from this to gather their eternal election, and that they have been given over to Christ, and committed to His charge and care; therefore is their coming put as an effect and evidence of

*Herein
justice and
mercy kiss one
another in
saving the
sinner.*

their being given.”

In J. B. Torrance’s caricature of covenant theology, “the Father has to be conditioned into

being gracious by the obedience and the satisfaction of the Son”. That is grossly misleading. Samuel Rutherford asserted the primacy of the love of God, declaring that if God’s love has a beginning, Christ has a beginning. He went on: “Christ loves you better than His life, for He gave His life to get your love.” Nowhere do we find orthodox federal theologians teaching that Christ’s satisfaction won the love of the Father. On the contrary, to cite Rutherford: “the shed blood of Christ is an effect, not a cause of infinite love.”

The federal theologians believed in a universal and gracious offer of the gospel, but a special love of God for the elect. As Samuel Rutherford put it: “Christ offers in the Gospel life to all, so that they believe, but God mindeth to bestow life on a few only.” God’s love is infinite in its act, but not in its object or extent. This is Calvinism, not as Torrance thinks, extreme hyper-Calvinism.

In T. F. Torrance’s view: “A God who

restricts His love to a fixed number of the elect is not a God who *is* Love and therefore is not as infinitely loving as His infinite Being.” McLeod Campbell veered towards universalism in his closing years, although Thomas Torrance disavows that sin. Yet there are obvious dangers in the kind of theology which wants to reduce God’s attributes to one, that is love. As “Rabbi” Duncan put it: “All errors are abused truths.”

5. Placing election before grace.

J. B. Torrance also charges federal theology with placing election before grace, so that the person and work of Christ is subordinated to the doctrine of the decrees. Torrance’s point hardly survives an encounter with the evidence. To cite Robert Traill: “And we know no grace, we call nothing grace, we care for no grace, but what comes from this head, the Saviour of the body.” Thomas Boston was so centred on Christ that he could write: “I contemned all things in comparison of Him, yea even heaven itself.”

In the Torrance school of Barthianism, grace is objective and unconditional for all. All the teeth of predestination are extracted, as “the hard conception of double predestination” is especially repudiated as “biblically and evangelically unfortunate”. Against this, David Dickson was content to point to Matthew 11:25-26, and write: “The cause of election of some and reprobation of others, of this or that man, rather than of others, is to be found only in God’s good pleasure.”

In Samuel Rutherford’s view, grace is not separated from justice but fulfills it. This is because God “cannot be God and essentially just, except He vindicate his glory of justice”. Justice is infinite because God is infinite. As Robert Traill put it: “Herein justice and mercy kiss one another in saving the sinner.”

The Torrance school has contributed much to the advancement of covenant theology. It has been responsible, for example, for the new translations of Calvin’s New Testament commentaries. There remains the next step, which is to understand them more accurately.

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Calvin and the WCF

Any differences are cultural and historical rather than theological.

Three generations separate the work of John Calvin (best represented in his *Institutes* of 1560) from that of the Westminster divines who composed the Westminster Confession (1646). The theological relationship between the two is a complex one that scholars are only now exploring. That there are both similarities and differences between the two is obvious to anyone who takes the trouble to read and compare them honestly. The major question is whether the supposed differences are so great that they destroy the theological lineage from the Westminster divines back to Calvin.

Some of the differences are due to a historical and cultural difference of time and place. Calvin grew up and was educated in the culture of renaissance Humanism compared with the more Scholastic culture of the British universities of the 17th century, where many of the Westminster divines received their mental training. A lot happened both in Britain and in Europe in the generations between the two parties. Calvin's Europe was coming to terms politically with the religious divisions of the Reformation while the Westminster divines did their work in the context of a civil war between the royal house of Stuart and the rights of the common people represented by the new parliamentary reforms. The theological issues of the Reformation were not identical to those of the 17th century because the Westminster divines had more opponents than Calvin. Where his sole opposition was medieval Catholicism, the Westminster divines had to contend with Catholicism, Arminianism and Socinianism.

One striking difference between the two is the way in which they did their theology, or what we would call today their theological method. Calvin's method is that of an exegete who works directly from the biblical text combined with that of a biblical theologian who is sensitive to the progressive and climactic nature of the biblical account of the divine plan of redemption running from Israel to Christ. As a result there is a fluency in his writing and thought that is missing from



**Douglas
Milne**

the Westminster divines. They were systematisers who used rational analysis (because of a revived Aristotelian logic in the work of the Protestant educator Peter Ramus) to dissect the truth of scripture in a less biblical-historical way.

The question here is whether their theological method vitiates their theological findings so as to make them unrecognisable descendants

of the author of the *Institutes*. It is the aim of this article to argue against this conclusion by showing some essential agreements between the Westminster divines and

Calvin on a range of fundamental topics that are integral to their theologies.

First, biblical authority. Contrary to the claim of Barthians – who differentiate the Word of God from the Bible, that Calvin never held to a belief in the verbal inspiration of the scriptures, his writings abound in references that equate the words of the biblical text with the words of the Holy Spirit. For Calvin, Scripture is the highest authority of all because it is the God-breathed Word of the Creator and Redeemer God. For example, “God has purposed to speak to us by the apostles and prophets, and their lips are the mouth of the one true God” (commentary on 1 Peter 1:25).

The Westminster divines begin their Confession with a magisterial chapter on the authority of Holy Scripture which they call the Word of God written. The supreme authority by which every dispute among Christians and churches must be settled “can be no other than the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures” (I: 10).

Within that chapter the divines make use of one of Calvin's own contributions

to the doctrine of biblical authority, and that is the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. “The testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason ... the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts” (*Institutes* I:7.4). In agreement with Calvin, the divines teach that the believer comes to know with certainty that Scripture is God's authoritative Word as a result of “the inner work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts” (I:5). The affinity between the divines and Calvin on the authority of scripture is complete.

Second, Calvin was a covenant theologian because of his sensitivity to the flow of the biblical narrative from Abraham to Christ. The God of the Bible is One who makes covenants with people in the interests of their salvation and His own glory. This accords with the way in which Paul thinks in Galatians 3 and 4, where he overviews the pattern of the history of salvation through a series of related covenants – the promise covenant with Abraham, followed by the law covenant with Israel, followed and capped by the faith covenant in Jesus Christ. In his *Institutes* (II:10–11) Calvin expounds this hermeneutical perspective as one that binds together the disparate parts of the biblical revelation as a whole.

The Westminster divines wrote a separate chapter (7) on the subject of God's covenants, something that virtually distinguishes this confession from all other reformed confessional writings. The covenant of grace sets the theological framework for their presentation of the whole plan and work of redemption in Jesus Christ, just as with Calvin. But the Westminster divines go further, for they teach a covenant present in the original relations between God and man in creation, the so-called covenant of works.

Barthian critics of the Westminster theology, with their own agenda of universal grace in Christ and their rejection of any other divine revelation outside of Christ, have seized on this to argue the

departure of the later reformed writers from the pure theology of Calvin.

Yet we now know that full covenant theology, consisting of a covenant of works and a covenant of grace together, was already prevailing across Europe and Britain within a generation after Calvin. The men of the late 16th century stood in direct dependency on Calvin as their acknowledged theological father. We believe they developed their fuller covenant theology as a natural outgrowth of Calvin's ground-breaking work. The Dutch theologian Herman Witsius, writing in the 17th century in the heyday of covenant theology, displays the same awareness of biblical patterns of divine revelation in history as Calvin himself. Both Calvin and the later Protestant writers could see that covenant is central in all divine-human relations.

Third, adoption. Calvin's favourite way of describing the high privilege of grace and salvation is that of adoption, the fact that through Jesus Christ, God's own Son, He makes those who believe in Him His sons and daughters and heirs of His eternal glory and kingdom. The whole of salvation is summed up in this honour and status of believers: "all the promises of God ought to rest on this foundation, that God has adopted us in Christ and He has promised that He will be our Father and our God" (commentary on Acts 7:32). Even more than justification, on which the battle of the Reformation was fought, Calvin chooses adoption for his preferred description of our highest saving privilege. In this he follows Paul whose teaching on salvation excels on this topic (Rom. 8:15-17, Gal. 4:4-7, Eph. 1:5).

Alone among all the reformed confes-

sions, the Westminster Confession has a separate chapter on Adoption (12) in which it repeats most of the teaching of Calvin just as he reproduces the teaching of Paul. The chapter consists of a single paragraph but this fact argues the importance the divines attached to the subject as a separate colour in the spectrum of redemptive blessings that Christ has won for His people.

Fourth, assurance of salvation. Calvin includes assurance as an essential element in saving faith

Calvin's approach was more Pauline, that of the divines more Johannine.

when he states: "Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely

given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit (*Institutes* III:2.7). There is a noticeably subjective element in Calvin's definition where he refers to the inner working of the Holy Spirit to bring about this degree of assurance of the truth of the Gospel and our share in it. Elsewhere Calvin is not averse to pointing to the personal signs of God's gracious work in the lives and experience of the saints themselves: "the election of God, which by itself is hidden, is made known by its marks, when God gathers to Himself the lost sheep, and joins them to His flock, and stretches out His hand to those who are wandering and estranged from Him. The knowledge of our election, therefore, must be sought from this

source" (commentary on 1 Thessalonians 1:4).

All this is said in view of the fact that some writers claim that Calvin was wholly objective about the subject of assurance, by concentrating everything on Christ in the Gospel, so that the later Westminster divines departed from him when they connected Christian assurance with the believer rather than what he believed in.

The Westminster divines, because they were interested in the typology of Christian experience, break down the source of assurance into three, in a separate chapter of their Confession (18). These are (i) the promises of salvation in Christ that we have in scripture, (ii) the visible and felt evidences of God's gracious work within us in the form of Christlike virtues, and (iii) the direct witness of the Holy Spirit with our spirits to our heavenly membership in God's family. Clearly the divines agree with Calvin on the first and main ground of assurance which is Christ in the Gospel promise of forgiveness and life, but then add the two further grounds of Christian character and spiritual experience that follow on from that.

On the subject of assurance Calvin and the Westminster divines have taught what was most relevant to their respective contexts. For Calvin this meant highlighting the trustworthiness of God's Gospel word centring in Christ, for people who were confused by the Church's teaching on the need for works coming to God and continuing with God. The Westminster divines were speaking for people who were claiming the Christian name without due regard to personal knowledge of God and the development of Christian virtues. We could say that Calvin's approach was more Pauline (Galatians), that of the divines more Johannine (1 John).

We may conclude therefore that the theological differences between Calvin and the authors of the Westminster Confession are relative in nature and limited in number in spite of different theological methods which show that they were men of their own cultural setting. These differences do not affect the fundamental agreements in their respective theologies. Both belong to the Augustinian-Reformational tradition going back to Paul, Jesus and the Old Testament prophets. They are members of the same theological family showing their own individual traits.

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Patriarchs & Providence

20 daily Bible studies in Genesis 28-36

We pick up the story of the patriarchs at the point where Jacob sets out for Haran in search of a wife.

Bible studies on the patriarchal narrative leading up to this point appeared in AP in July and August 2003.

This section of the patriarchal narrative starts and ends at Bethel and so is really about the God whom Jacob knew as the God of Bethel. The story of Jacob's long journey from Bethel to Bethel, covering a span of more than two decades, is a wonderful story of God's faithfulness in the midst of His perplexing providence.

Some of us might be struggling with God's providence at present as we look at what is happening in different places in the world, as we look at where our own society is heading, and as we experience it first-hand in our own churches and families. I hope that as we walk beside Jacob through this month, share in all his struggles and see how he handled them (or rather, how God handled them), we will be encouraged greatly in our own walk. Our journey might even bring us back to our own "Bethel" where we renew our commitment to the "God of Bethel". Philip Doddridge's hymn, "O God of Bethel" was constantly on my mind as I wrote these studies.

Bruce Christian

DAY 1

Awesome reality

THE PASSAGE

GENESIS 28:10-22

THE POINT To understand Jacob's dream at Bethel we need to look at John 1:51. God reveals to Jacob what will be the basis of all the covenant promises He has made to Abraham and Isaac, and which He now renews to him. Access between man and God will be rooted in the earth. Heavenly messengers will first ascend to report that a Man has bridged the gap by (1) living the life of perfect obedience that Adam should have lived but didn't; (2) dying in the place of sinners to satisfy God's justice; and (3) rising again as proof that death is conquered. They then descend with the good news about forgiveness and eternal life. Jesus is the ladder.

THE PARTICULARS

- We are left in no doubt that the dream was given to Jacob by the Sovereign Creator LORD who had made a firm promise to his father and grandfather; it wasn't just a figment of his imagination or baseless self-deception. Even Jacob was convinced (13, 16f).
- God wants his people to be confident and assured of His faithfulness to all His promises (15, cf Matt. 28:20, Hebrews 13:5-6).
- Jacob set up the stone witness before he made his vow; his "if" was more an expression of certainty than a proviso (20f).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Is your commitment to God's covenant promises rock solid?

DAY 2

A man on a mission

THE PASSAGE

GENESIS 29:1-13

THE POINT Lost opportunities were never Jacob's thing. Literally, verse 1 says, "Jacob lifted up his feet and went...". He had met with his God who had renewed His promise: once more his eye focussed on the blessing! At the back of beyond he meets some shepherds and wastes no time in discovering they know his uncle Laban. The sovereign God now matches his vigour with the advent of beautiful Rachel. With the subtlety of a bulldozer Jacob tries to move the shepherds off stage left (7). The ploy fails but with no regard for protocol, embarrassment or gossip, in front of the whole cast, he jumps the queue, pumps enough adrenalin to shift the heavy stone single-handed, waters Rachel's sheep, gives her a passionate kiss and hug ... then introduces himself! (vs. 12 KJV) For the next 14 years at least this woman will be his total life focus. God's promised blessing is intricately tied up with her.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jacob was single-minded (or, rather, "married-minded") in his pursuit of God's blessing; nothing could distract him from it.
- God has absolute sovereign control over the affairs of men – and He has their welfare in mind in all He does (cf Romans 8:28).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How focussed are you in your desire to obtain God's blessing?

DAY 3 *Mind games*

THE PASSAGE GENESIS 29:14-30

THE POINT The opening sentence of v. 14 sets the scene for all the trouble that will follow – Laban and Jacob are from the same gene-bank! (The NIV editors miss this subtle point by linking it with 1-13.) Often the people we find it hardest to relate to are the ones who share our personality traits. As we trace the Laban-Jacob saga over the next few days try to get a feel for what is going on in each of their minds, behind the words they are actually saying. Laban could see clearly the sparkle in his nephew’s eye so why miss an opportunity to turn it into many years of “free” labour, while at the same time appearing to be generous? Little did he realise that this newly acquainted relative was of the same ilk.

- THE PARTICULARS**
- Jacob was so keen to receive God’s blessing that any cost to be met seemed insignificant in comparison (cf Matthew 13:44-46).
 - We often focus on Jacob’s faults and passions but unlike many today he obviously showed great restraint and self-control (21).
 - The four women introduced into Jacob’s life would become a source of great distress, but God still worked out His sovereign purposes through all of them – and Jesus came from Leah’s line.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What have you learnt from Jacob’s good/bad example today?

DAY 4 *Now I will praise the LORD*

THE PASSAGE GENESIS 29:31-35

THE POINT When we struggle with God’s providence at a personal level it is good to bear in mind that the whole story of the outworking of God’s Plan in the Bible is a combination of things that don’t seem to fit with our ideas as well as things that do. After her sister came to share the marriage bed, Leah found herself in a position that needed God’s intervention on her behalf, but why so blatantly at Rachel’s expense? Even so, Leah had yet much to learn about all relationships. In the last analysis, human relationships will let us down, and all that really matters is God.

- THE PARTICULARS**
- It seems quite strange to us (at least for the time being) that God should meet Leah’s emotional needs by being so hard on Rachel.
 - In the naming of her first three sons, Leah was motivated by her own deep emotional needs: her focus was completely on herself.
 - Verse 35 seems to be making the point that the LORD had been waiting for Leah to turn her concern away from herself to Him. So when Judah was named there was no need for more sons!
 - These 4 sons of Leah had leading roles. Jesus came from Judah.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- When you struggle with God’s providence in your life do you tend to focus on your own needs or on His praiseworthiness?

DAY 5 *Rivals grasp, God rules*

THE PASSAGE GENESIS 30:1-13

THE POINT God’s “big-picture” story in the Bible shows beyond doubt that He really is all-wise, all-loving and all-powerful. But it also makes clear that pain and suffering are an important part of this story. The passion of Jesus is proof of this. Our sense of justice and fair play question the rightness of usurper Leah’s God-given fertility in contrast with innocent victim Rachel’s God-inflicted barrenness. This is especially so when we realise that Rachel, in deference to her older sister’s claim, would herself have had to agree to the marriage conspiracy, humbly, without complaint, and at great personal emotional cost. We can identify with her bitter outburst to Jacob, and the cry of utter helplessness and frustration in his response. But we can also look ahead to see that the subsequent human drama, with all its bitter anguish preserved forever in the names of the sons, was actually the sovereign Lord working out His wise, loving, eternal purposes.

- THE PARTICULARS**
- Rachel’s “vindication” and “victory” through the birth of Dan and Naphtali, and Leah’s retaliation, were hollow triumphs. This petty case of sibling rivalry had far-reaching consequences.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are you willing to suffer injustice for the sake of God’s glory?

DAY 6 *Then God remembered Rachel*

THE PASSAGE GENESIS 30:14-24

THE POINT Poor Rachel! She loved Jacob. She was manoeuvred out of a God-ordained, exclusive, one-flesh relationship, and is now being denied God’s promised blessing of children (cf Genesis 2:24, 1:27f). Leah “jumped the queue” on a technicality and using off-spring as a measure of God’s blessing/approval led 4-0, then matched Rachel’s use of “subs” 2-2. Years had gone by. Reuben was now a man. The loved, chosen wife was desperate. Wrong as it was, we can’t blame her for trying a local superstition: because of its shape the mandrake plant was thought to effect fertility. Even this move failed, or rather backfired, and as a result Leah scored 2 more goals making the score 6-0 (or 8-2 counting the “subs”). Why did God listen to Leah and not Rachel (17-19)? Where is the justice? The hardest lesson for us to learn is that God is God, He can protect the honour of His own name, and He does what is best – and with perfect timing. Joseph was born!

- THE PARTICULARS**
- God’s providence is often hard to live with, but taking matters into our own hands has the habit of only making things worse.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Did Leah’s success in material things achieve for her what she really longed for in her heart? What can we learn from this?

DAY 7 *Spot the best sheep*

THE PASSAGE GENESIS 30:25-43

THE POINT It isn’t easy to work out what is going on here – and the use of personal pronouns instead of names in places doesn’t help. It seems what happened is this: Jacob’s suggestion for dividing the flock seemed more than fair to Laban, which therefore made him suspicious of his son-in-law. So to prevent any funny business he (L) did the culling himself, left Jacob (the one who seemed to always attract divine blessing) in charge of his (Ls) superior flock and his (Ls) own sons in charge of J’s inferior animals. What he didn’t allow for was that Jacob had found a way of producing marked offspring from good, strong, unmarked stock using chemically treated water, or a kind of auto-suggestion, or simply using the peeled branches as a symbol of God’s ruling hand at a genetic level (see 31:10-13). It seems Jacob did two other things (40ff): as marked offspring were born he left some with Laban’s animals to produce more marked offspring for himself; he put only the strongest in the peeled branch program.

- THE PARTICULARS**
- It was inevitable that Jacob and Laban would have to separate. Neither trusted the other (with very good reason!); they had different spiritual values and incompatible world views.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Was Jacob right in fooling Laban yet again? Did Laban suffer?

DAY 8 *Seek first God’s Kingdom*

THE PASSAGE GENESIS 31:1-21

THE POINT From their very first meeting Laban was quick to see how he could use his nephew to advantage: a chance to off-load Leah, 14 years of “free” labour and expert farming know-how – what a windfall if he played his cards right! Sadly, if his greed had not mastered him, his prosperity might have continued for many more years. But now it was time for God to send Jacob back home, as he’d promised at Bethel (28:13-15), and God would ensure a fair distribution of the wealth Jacob had enabled his uncle to acquire. Yes, Jacob’s God-given abilities (including the cunning!) would play a big part in the process, but this chosen vessel rightly saw these as only secondary causes; the primary cause was God’s gracious fulfilment of His covenant promises.

- THE PARTICULARS**
- Laban’s sons were also richly blessed by God, but they could not see this, let alone be grateful; their whole focus was on how much their cousin had and therefore how he had “robbed” them.
 - Rachel and Leah could see that it was Jacob’s God who was the true source of blessing; but Rachel’s stealing of her father’s gods exposes her gene pool and shows she has more to learn.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What is the fundamental difference between Jacob and Laban?

DAY 9 *Our faithful God*

THE PASSAGE GENESIS 31:22-37

THE POINT God knew Laban was the sort of person whose forked tongue could not even be trusted to say something nice to Jacob. It was all very well for him to protest that he would have liked to be able to say goodbye to his grandchildren but we all know what would have really happened. We all know people like Laban whose sinful nature disqualifies them from certain privileges, and who then get all offended and hurt. But Jacob's faithful God was able to protect him, even from the consequences of Rachel's rash act in stealing the household gods! Perhaps Isaiah was thinking of this event when he wrote, "the LORD will go before you, the God of Israel (ie Jacob) will be your rear guard." (Isaiah 52:12)

THE PARTICULARS

- The fact that Laban still had his household gods (and missed them), after 20 years of close association with Jacob, shows he did not seek and come to know the God of his uncle Abraham.
- Rachel's skill in handling the tent episode with such composure says a lot about the genes she shared with her cousin-husband and her aunt Rebekah; it is an amazing act of God's grace that Joseph and Benjamin turned out with such open, honest natures.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are you trusting in God's covenant faithfulness in your life?

DAY 10 *The parting of the ways*

THE PASSAGE GENESIS 31:38-55

THE POINT Jacob and Laban's final parting was inevitable. For 20 years they had tried to work together but it was never going to work. In a physical/temporal sense Jacob was going home to his family; in a spiritual/eternal sense Jacob and Laban had entirely different "homes". Jacob longed for the community where God was noticeably present and real among His people as evidenced in the lives of his father and grandfather (v. 42). What a contrast Laban and his family had been, treating God like a commodity to be used or discarded at will, good for a blessing handout, or a bit of kudos or religious security, but a terrible nuisance in the greedy pursuit of material gain. "Yes, a witnessed covenant of separation would be a good idea, Uncle. And we will trust in the God of our fathers, my God (but not yours!), to protect us both from each other's scheming – scheming that is unavoidable because we are on a completely different wavelength."

THE PARTICULARS

- Jacob's outline of his time in Haran testified to the goodness of a God he knew personally as his protector/provider/friend.
- Laban's attempt at "religion" was impersonal, formal and empty.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Which society are you most at home in, Laban's or Jacob's?

DAY 11 *Six steps to reconciliation*

THE PASSAGE GENESIS 32:1-21

THE POINT Laban was now safely out of the frame but Jacob's worries were far from over. Every step further away from his alienated uncle was a step closer to his hostile brother! Are you caught between a rock and a hard place as you struggle with difficult relationships, perhaps at a few levels? Look at Jacob's plan.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jacob's six-step plan to deal with a very daunting situation:
 1. Recognise spiritual resources (angels) available to help (1-2).
 2. Prepare in advance humble and genuine terms for peace (3-5).
 3. If this appears to fail (6: an army of 400 is hardly a welcoming party), plan a common sense strategy to minimise losses (7-8).
 4. Pray earnestly, reminding God of His Word and His promises (9).
 5. Humbly acknowledge your sin and utter dependence on God's mercy and grace, followed by grateful, specific, believing prayer based on God's promised faithfulness to the helpless (10-12).
 6. Have a genuine desire to receive forgiveness from a wronged party, backing it up with generous, practical evidence (13-21).
- Jacob's fear of man was cancelled out by his active fear of God.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are there parallels to these steps in God's Plan to reconcile us?

DAY 12 *D-Day*

THE PASSAGE GENESIS 32:22-32

THE POINT Jacob had done all he could to prepare for the showdown with Esau. Could he now lose the blessing he'd sought from the day he was born ... no, even before that (25:22-26)? There was one more decisive battle he had to fight. He needed time alone ... to think. And there God met him in a new way. God's "Man", or angel (cf Hosea 12:4), or his pre-incarnate Son Jesus(?), tested Jacob to see if God's blessing was still his most sought after prize, more than the Esau problem, more than his family, more than even his life – his pearl, his treasure (Matthew 13:44-46).

THE PARTICULARS

- Jacob was given the name Israel because "he had struggled with God and with men and had overcome" (28). In Hebrew, the simple meaning of Israel is "God strives and rules"! The irony is that Jacob won by being conquered in the only battle that, in the end, really matters (as his limp would always remind him).
- "Jacob" is about wresting the blessing from men, by fair means or foul (25:26); "Israel" is about wresting the blessing from God.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Have you had this D-Day battle that takes away pride and self-reliance forever? Have you really prayed, as George Matheson did, "Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free"?

DAY 13 *Reconciled at last!*

THE PASSAGE GENESIS 33:1-11

THE POINT We can only surmise how much each of the different factors contributed to the peaceful, even joyful, meeting of the twins, Jacob and Esau. After 20 years reflecting on what his brother had stolen from him, how could Esau have been so positive (4)? Perhaps his father had convinced him of the futility of revenge; perhaps his mother was right in her character assessment of him that material gain would soon eclipse any enthusiasm he might have for the birthright (27:45); perhaps he had intended to kill Jacob (hence the 400 men) but the gifts had served their purpose, much as the lentil stew had done so long ago (25:34). What we can be sure of is that God's sovereign hand of grace had been at work in all these factors so that the blessing He had promised would surely come to the chosen covenant family.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jacob's faith and courage are seen in his willingness to face Esau first; but arranging for Rachel and Joseph to be in the safest place if there was trouble would have been noticed by Leah and sons.
- The verbal exchange between the twins (9-11) was the normal way to do business; both knew that Esau would keep the lot.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Does this account encourage you to pray for your enemies?

DAY 14 *The parting of the ways II*

THE PASSAGE GENESIS 33:12-20

THE POINT God's amazing grace worked a miracle enabling the brothers to be reconciled. But their old natures were still evident, just as ours are, and in spite of their attempts to sound as if they were the best of friends who only had the other's needs at heart, it is clear from the narrative that neither actually trusted the other one bit and the only hope of lasting peace was for there to be maintained a reasonable amount of real estate in between them. God's covenant people should always try to stay on good terms with their neighbours but at the end of the day Paul's wise advice to the Church at Corinth in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 must be heeded.

THE PARTICULARS

- It is significant that in the remaining 18 chapters of Genesis after Jacob ("cheat") was renamed Israel ("God strives and conquers") he's referred to 45 times by the old name and 23 by the new!
- Seir is 80km SSE of the Dead Sea; Shechem is 80km NNW of it!
- Jacob named his first altar on land bought in the Promised Land "God, the God of Israel". This Covenant God he had known as the God of Abraham and of Isaac, he now knew as his own God.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do you find it hard to stay on friendly terms with your non-Christian friends without compromising your walk with God?

DAY 15 *Date rape isn't new*

THE PASSAGE GENESIS 34:1-12

THE POINT Jacob had not long separated from ungodly Esau, so as to avoid having to face future pressure to compromise, when this same pressure came from the very people among whom he'd settled. God's people will always face this pressure in a fallen world; it's how we handle it that matters. Shechem is a good example of modern, "enlightened, mature, adult", ungodly Man. Like a brute beast, he just did things in the order they came; patience and self-discipline had no place in his thinking. If it feels good, do it.

THE PARTICULARS

- Shechem may well have loved Dinah tenderly; he may well have had the most honourable intentions to marry her and be a good, loving husband. But all this was useless if he couldn't control his sexual passion. Date rape is not a good courting technique.
- Shechem's basic problem is exposed most clearly in his selfish, chauvinistic demand, "Get me this girl as my wife". An attitude like this was never a good foundation for a happy marriage!
- Unbridled sexual passion led to pressure to compromise God's covenant terms with people who were not part of them (8-10).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- TV, movies etc, make clear our society's idea of accepted moral standards. How much have Christians already compromised?

DAY 16 *The tangled web we weave*

THE PASSAGE GENESIS 34:13-31

THE POINT Paul tells us that all Scripture is breathed out by God and is useful to us to teach, rebuke, correct and train in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). So how do we fit this passage into that truth? How do we unscramble what is right from what is wrong? It seems there are six important lessons God is teaching us here:

1. God is serious about the moral values set down in His Word.
2. God doesn't want his people to compromise and do deals with the world. The Church needs to note this today.
3. Subtle deception, especially when it exploits God's laws, is a dishonourable means of achieving God's purposes.
4. God cares about His covenant relationship with His people.
5. Although Simeon and Levi could justify their action as morally "right" (31), Jacob's wise words about the dangers inherent in exacting revenge (30) are worth noting, especially today.
6. Our only hope in this fallen world is God's saving grace.

THE PARTICULARS

- The Bible is brutally honest about the reality of human sin.
- Dinah's brothers' profession of righteous indignation becomes a bit hollow when they cart off all the women as plunder! (29)

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How can we avoid the sort of error made by Dinah's brothers?

DAY 17 *An old place, a fresh start*

THE PASSAGE GENESIS 35:1-15

THE POINT Shechem, Esau, Laban, Leah ... Is it possible to turn over a new leaf, to forget all the struggles, disappointments and mistakes of the past two decades, to make a fresh start? Bethel, the "house of God", was the place where Jacob really began his journey of faith, where he met with God and made a solemn vow (28:19-22). Bethel was the place to which God had told him to return when things didn't work out with Laban (31:13). Perhaps he should have gone straight there then! Jacob's memories of Bethel were so vivid that even after such a long time they were still firmly implanted in his mind. God would be there in a special way and Jacob knew there was no longer any room for compromise. God had stayed faithful; Jacob would be faithful too. His new name "Israel" would have new meaning – there was no turning back.

THE PARTICULARS

- God's prevailing presence with Jacob was evident to all (5).
- God Almighty (El Shaddai) renewed the promises he had given to Abraham (17:1-2) and foreshadowed through Isaac (28:3-4).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Is there a "Bethel" to which you need to return? Have you accumulated "foreign gods" you need to "bury" first? What is the most appropriate "offering" for you to make (Rom. 12:1-2)?

DAY 18 *Joy in the midst of sorrow*

THE PASSAGE GENESIS 35:16-29

THE POINT The Christian life is an intricate mix of joy and sorrow. This has always been our sovereign God's way of dealing with His people whom He loves. Jacob and Rachel were no exception. Even as God's covenant child Rachel still had to bear, for nearly 20 years, the stigma of childlessness and the humiliation of sharing the husband she loved, and who loved her, with 3 fertile women. Even as God's covenant child Jacob still had to watch Rachel die as she gave birth to her second son, Benjamin – son of my right hand, yes, but also son of my trouble. Great joy and great sorrow, all in the one event. Nor was Jacob spared the hurt and disgrace of his first-born son's adultery with Rachel's maid, a grossly immoral act he could never really forget (49:4).

THE PARTICULARS

- Rachel's tomb became a landmark for many years (1 Sam. 10:2).
- The birth of Jacob's last son, Benjamin, provides a good occasion for the whole 12 sons to be listed in their maternal groups.
- The cooperation of both Esau and Jacob in the burial of Isaac points to the grace of God at work in spite of themselves (29).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Many Christians today believe that a sign of faith and godliness is the blessing of health and wealth. Is this an accurate picture?

DAY 19 *Exit Esau...*

THE PASSAGE GENESIS 36:1-19

THE POINT It is important for God to bring down the curtain on Esau, the rejected son of Isaac (Mal. 1:2-3, Rom. 9:13), before he continues the story of the covenant line through Jacob (Israel). The reason given for Esau's moving to the hill country of Seir (to the SE of the Dead Sea, some distance from his brother Jacob) (6) is that the land could not support the two of them. This, of course, was true, but as we saw on Day 14, the twins had been on divergent journeys since the day they were born. Jacob was looking forward to "the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:9-10), while Esau was seeking his fortune, and therefore his destiny, in this world only. He was gaining the whole world and forfeiting his soul (Mk 8:36).

THE PARTICULARS

- Esau took Canaanite wives, contrary to God's covenant plan (cf 24:3), and when he realised the mistake he tried to rectify it by marrying into Ishmael's family (28:8-9). But Ishmael was also outside the covenant! Poor Esau could never seem to win.
- The conflict between Jacob and Esau lived on in the later conflict between Israel and Edom (Num. 20:14-21, Obad. 1:8-11).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How would you like your life to be summed up when you die?

DAY 20 *...and his "kinsmen"*

THE PASSAGE GENESIS 36:20-43

THE POINT Before we finally say goodbye to Esau as he disappears from the stage of God's covenant-salvation history, we need to have some loose ends tied up. We have already seen how Esau's lack of covenantal enthusiasm in general led to his intermarrying with the Canaanites and the Ishmaelites. We are now told that when he settled in the region of Seir he married into a leading family there, that of Anah son of Zibeon (cf 2, 24-25). A brief comparison between the different lists of names in this chapter shows that the Edomites (Edom was Esau's nickname, "Red" – 25:30) were a very mixed race, quite outside the covenant line.

THE PARTICULARS

- The use of "Hivite" (2) and "Horite" (20f, 29f) to describe the same people suggests that both names were used interchangeably for the original inhabitants of Seir, of whom little else is known.
- The word in verse 24 translated "hot springs" in NIV and "mules" in KJV is unknown and only occurs here in the Bible.
- The most natural explanation of the allusion to (future) "kings of Israel" in verse 31 is that it is a later editorial comment.
- Kingship in Edom was non-dynastical and therefore unstable.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Does your life reflect your covenant relationship with God?



Across Australia

Munro to be moderator

Pastor Greg Munro of Scottsdale is the Moderator-Nominate of the Presbyterian Church of Tasmania. The Ulverstone congregation is vacant and is looking for a new minister. The Interim-Moderator is Rev. Peter Thorneycroft (03) 6331 5412.

Fertile field

Graham and Sue Hammond are the latest missionaries from the Croydon Hills (Vic) congregation. The congregation has seen Douglas and Jeanette Bennett, Barbara Brown, Ashley and Sara Manley and Rob Paix all move into various fields of service in recent times.

New chaplain

On 7 February at the morning assembly of Somerville House (a boarding day school in South Brisbane run by the Presbyterian and Methodist Schools Association) Cath Butler was officially commissioned as associate chaplain to the college. Cath has been involved at Somerville for four years in a teaching and pastoral role. She was inducted into office by Rev. Guido Kettmiss, chairman of the PMSA before hundreds of girls, staff, visiting friends and family.

Reformation time

The Reformation Fellowship Ministers and Elders Conference was held at Mt Tamborine (Qld). The three speakers were Rev. Peter Bloomfield (PCQ), Rev. Dr Peter Barnes (PCNSW) and Rev. Dr Rowland Ward (PC Eastern Australia).

Scotch opens centre

On 10 February the final stage of the James Forbes Academy, a complex devoted to music, drama and communication was opened at Scotch College in Melbourne. It is named after the founder of the school, Rev. James Forbes, who arrived in Melbourne in February 1838 and was the first Christian minister in the infant city.

PLC expands

Presbyterian Ladies' College Melbourne opened its new junior school buildings on 18 February, as part of the famous school's 130th birthday celebrations. Moderator-General Bob Thomas made the opening prayer of dedication, and Dr Brendan Nelson, the Federal Minister of Education, officially opened the new building. Mrs Elizabeth Ward, the principal, noted in her comments that five years of hard work were coming to fruition with the completion of the new junior school. Earlier in the week 1300 PLC students had gathered in Scots Church, Melbourne, for a special Foundation Day service.

Mission week

Chatswood (NSW) congregation hosted a team from the Presbyterian Theological Centre, Sydney, in early April for a week of mission.

Up in the air

Robert Hovenden from Berrigan (NSW) has been accepted for service with MAF at Mareeba (Qld). He completed his studies at the Bible College of Victoria in 2004, and was commissioned at his home congregation on 20 February.

PIM gathering

Henk and Henny Tiemens (PIM WA Kimberley-Pilbara Patrol), Bert and Penny Pierce (WA Mid-West Patrol), Rev. Mike Willsmore (PIM South-West NSW Patrol), Rev. Terry and Judy Sadler (PIM North-West NSW Patrol) and Andrew and Kerri Purcell (PIM South-West Qld Patrol) all gathered in Melbourne to be part of a series of PIM meetings and events as well as to attend the 2005 PTC Melbourne Ministers Refresher Conference. They were later joined at the PIM retreat in Mildura by Rev. Laurie and Gwen Peake (PIM Qld Leichhart Patrol).

On 15 March the padres and their wives gathered at the PTC with a large group of friends and supporters (for a service of commissioning and thanksgiving led by Moderator-General Bob Thomas. The gathering recognised the work of the outgoing Superintendent, Jack Knapp, as well as welcoming the new superintendent, Rev. Stuart Bonnington. It was an evening full of encouragement for the PIM, a high point of which was the recep-

tion of a very generous gift to the PIM of \$75,000 from the Wangaratta Regional Parish to cover the cost of purchasing and equipping of a new vehicle for the John Flynn Patrol in South Australia.

New office

The Presbyterian Inland Mission office now operates from their new premises at Level 1, 16 Collins Place, Kilsyth, Victoria, 3137 which they share with the National Journal Committee. The Postal address is therefore the same and is: PO Box 375, Kilsyth, Vic, 3137

Room to plant

The Missions Committee of the PC South Australia has declared that there is almost unlimited scope for church planting work in the Adelaide metropolitan area as well as in country South Australia. Please contact Rev. Dr Reg Mathews, (08) 83957841.



Around the World

Korea top persecutor

For the third straight year, the communist nation of North Korea remains at the top of the annual Open Doors International "World Watch List" of countries where Christians are persecuted.

"Christianity is observed as one of the greatest threats to the regime's power," the 2005 World Watch List report states. Exact figures are difficult to obtain, but it is believed that tens of thousands of Christians are suffering in North Korean prison camps, and at least 20 Christians were shot or beaten to death in 2004 while in detention.

The annual list ranks countries according to the intensity of persecution Christians face for actively pursuing their faith. Five of the top 10 are Islamic-dominated countries, four have communist regimes in power, and one country, Bhutan, is dominated by Buddhism.

Saudi Arabia again held the second spot on the list, followed by Vietnam, Laos, Iran, Maldives, Somalia, Bhutan, China and Afghanistan. Newcomers to the top 10 are Somalia and Afghanistan. Dropping out of the top 10 are Turkmenistan (No. 12) and Myanmar

(No. 17). Somalia moved up four places to seventh in the rankings primarily because “Christian converts from Islam are paying a high price for their new faith, especially in rural parts of this most lawless country in the world”.

Assist News Service

Muslim converts threatened

Some 3000 Christians in the UK are in danger because they have chosen to convert from Islam. Some are being actively harassed and persecuted, but many church leaders seem more interested in defending their attackers than in standing up for the rights of the converts.

Nissar Hussain, a Christian convert from Islam in Bradford, has suffered three years of harassment, amounting effectively to persecution, from the local Muslims in his neighbourhood. His car has been torched and rammed, bricks have been thrown through his window on many occasions, there have been threats to burn the house down, and much else besides. From its inception, Islam has rigorously sought to prevent its adherents from choosing any other faith. Such apos-

tates are regarded as traitors and – according to shari’a (Islamic law) – should be executed.

Barnabas Fund

Learning Yembi

In **Wewak**, Papua New Guinea, missionaries **Brooks** and **Nina Buser**, **Dave** and **Missy Schroeder** and **Tony** and **Tara Sutton** are pursuing the Yembi language full steam ahead. “There have already been times when we have laughed at ourselves, wanted to cry, or just plain thought there is no way we are ever going to get this!” wrote Tara Sutton. “But God has been faithful.”

The men devote a minimum of eight hours a day to language and culture study and the ladies have a two-hour daily minimum to balance with home-schooling their kids, keeping house and cooking meals.

Recognising that the Yembi women hold a key in unlocking part of the Yembi culture to them, Tara, Missy and Nina spend more than the minimum time gleaning culture and language tidbits with their Yembi friends.

A **New Tribes Mission** language consultant visits every six months to evaluate their progress and encourage them as they tackle this unwritten language.

New Tribes Mission

Church unity

Ireland’s four church leaders have formally commended a project which channels young people into a practical demonstration of God’s love in their local community. Issued by the **Catholic Archbishop of Armagh**, the **Anglican Primate of All Ireland**, the **Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland** and the **President of the Methodist Church in Ireland**, the commendation says the **StreetReach** project offers young people an excellent opportunity to connect with the needs of the local community and put faith into practice.

StreetReach is an outreach of the **Church Army** and **Summer Madness** – Ireland’s largest Christian festival – that works in partnership with local churches and community projects, focusing on needy areas.

Some past StreetReach projects have

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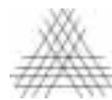
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included cleaning up streets, painting positive wall murals and cleaning up graffiti, taking the elderly on outings, hosting street parties and community barbecues and running events and activities for children.

Assist News Service

Cloning decision applauded

Noted scientists and ethicists gathered for the **Global State of Stem Cells and Cloning** conference in Rome broke into spontaneous applause at the announcement that the **United Nations** passed a political declaration banning human cloning. The vote was 84 for, 34 against and 37 abstentions.

Dr Alfonso Gomez-Lobo of **Georgetown University** said, "I am very happy to hear the outcome of this vote because it seems to me that human cloning would be passing a barrier that would be detrimental for humanity because in the name of our imposing a genome on other human beings we would be violating their dignity."

Noted author and ethicist **Wesley J. Smith** said: "The UN has powerfully demonstrated that naked science is not the be-all and end-all of the pursuit of human progress. Morality matters too. The task for us now is to work together as a world community to develop a thriving and moral biotechnology sector that both alleviates human suffering and remains within proper ethical boundaries."

Threat in Nepal

The Nepali Church has grown from 29 believers in 1959 to around 500,000 in 3000 congregations today (*Operation World*). Church growth in Nepal testifies to courageous, sacrificial witness and faithfulness. Militant Hindus still target Christians and social pressure remains intense. The Maoist insurgency that has ravaged Nepal for nine years adds to the suffering.

Nepal's Maoist rebels claim to be inspired by Chinese revolutionary leader Mao Zedong, while they model themselves on Peru's Shining Path (Maoist) guerrillas. They have up to 15,000 "hard-core" fighters and some 50,000 militiamen, as well as considerable support in rural areas. On 1 February 2005 **King Gyanendra** perpetrated a "coup against democracy" when he dismissed the government, assumed executive power and declared a state of emergency.

WEA Religious Liberty Commission



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Why men hate church

Jesus brought men to life, but our churches bore them to death.

We came down to earth with a painful thump. After years of bravely bucking the trend, the reality finally hit. In our congregation, men are now a minority. It only seems like yesterday when the statistics told a much more balanced story... back in 2003, a survey showed the genders in our church were almost evenly balanced, at 49 per cent men and 51 per cent women. We gave ourselves a pat on the back, and got on with it. Suddenly, though, something has changed. Quietly, unobserved, the scales have swung. And now, in every adult age group, there's a creeping gender gap. Take a look at the hard evidence.

In the 18-27 age group, our new church directory lists 49 women and 42 men. That's only 4 per cent off centre... and easy to dismiss as "not so bad." The 28-37 age group has a 41/36 ratio of women to men – 53 per cent female. The 38-47 group runs at 27 women to 22 men; and then the gap steadily increases, to 16/4 in the 78+ demographic. That's partly accounted for by the well documented fact that women tend to outlive men by around 10 years. But maybe there are other forces at work.

Overall, it boils down to this: in April 2005, 57 per cent of our adult congrega-



Phil Campbell

tion is female, and 43 per cent male. Mind you, by today's standards, that's pretty good. In his article "Why Men Hate

Christianity has bred a culture aimed at women and older folks.

Going to Church," author David Murrow says less than 40 per cent of American church attenders are male, and that more than one fifth of married women attend without their husbands. No

doubt they're at home mowing the lawn.

Murrow offers some interesting comments on the problem. For starters, he says, it's wrong to assume men are somehow "less religious" than women. While other faiths have no trouble inspiring male allegiance, he says Christianity has bred a culture aimed at women and older folks.

"Most churches offer a safe, nurturing

community, an oasis of stability and predictability," says Murrow. By default, anything that's not comfortable and safe is vetoed by long-time members. The problem is, that's not what men are looking for. "Men and young adults are drawn to risk, challenge, and daring," claims Murrow.

Further, he says, there's a perception problem. "Many guys feel church is a "women's thing". Most men are introduced to Christianity by women... nuns, or Sunday School teachers, or their mum. Boys meet a feminised Jesus – a tender, sweet man in a shining white dress. Worse, most volunteer opportunities in church involve traditionally female roles: singing, sewing, cooking, caring for kids, teaching, or planning social gatherings. "There's nothing for a guy to do," chides Murrow "unless he has a passion for handing out bulletins or attending meetings."

So what should we do about it? The problem is critical, because statistically, a lack of male participation is one of the surest predictors of church decline. "The denominations with the biggest gender gaps are also those that have been losing members and shutting churches," says Murrow. "On the other hand, churches with robust male participation are generally growing." So here are his seven top tips for creating a "man-friendly" church.

Principle one: Cultivate a healthy masculine spirit in your church. From the moment he walks in, a man must sense that church is not just a ladies' club. Murrow is blunt. "The quilted banners, fresh flowers, and boxes of Kleenex in our sanctuaries make a statement. So do practices such as holding hands with your neighbor, "prayer and share" times, or highly emotional displays. Our goal is not to get men to cry; it's to get them walking with God, however that may look."

Principle two: Make men feel needed and wanted. Encourage men to use their gifts, even if they don't fit traditional models of Christian service – get them to serve the poor by working on cars or fixing up houses. Let men plan adventures and do "guy things" together.

Principle three: Present Christ's masculine side. Pastors who present a "soft

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Jesus” week after week run the risk of turning men off. “Even more bewildering,” says Murrow, “are today’s praise songs – many of which feature lovey-dovey lyrics set to a romantic tune. Guys may feel unnatural singing romantic words to another man. Men want a leader, not a love object.”

Principle four: Avoid feminine terminology. Christian men tend to use terms such as precious, share, and relationship — words you’d never hear on the lips of a typical man. Murrow says, “We talk a lot about the saved and the lost; men don’t want to be either. And here’s a term that puzzles a lot of guys: ‘a personal relationship with Jesus.’ Christ’s bold, masculine command, ‘Follow Me!’ has been turned into ‘Have a relationship with Me.’ We’ve recast Jesus’ offer in feminine terms.”

Principle five: Preach shorter sermons. “I know pastors will hate this principle,” says Murrow, “but men say that “long, boring sermons” are the number one reason they avoid church.”

Principle six: Become students of men. Although most pastors are male, Murrow claims that few truly understand men. “Women keep the ministry machine going, so pastors focus on keeping females happy and volunteering. This must change.”

Principle seven: Create a culture of person-to-person challenge. In many churches, the pastor challenges from the pulpit, but people don’t challenge and encourage each other. Person-to-person discipleship, in small teams, is the only way to bring men to maturity in Christ.

So where to from here? Our own congregation, at least, is going to take stock before it’s too late. We’ve had a long history of high male involvement, which has already set a positive tone for men. But – without alienating the women who make up more than half our congregation – we need to make sure we don’t unconsciously “feminise” our environment and the style of our services. I think Murrow puts his finger on a very real issue when he mentions the cringe factor that comes with singing “Jesus-is-my-boyfriend” style songs. Robust hymns and non-pentecostal contemporary songs that focus on the cross are far better. Better yet, perhaps we should think about actually minimising the amount we expect Aussie men to sing? (And a note to the “worship team” – don’t even *think about* introducing “responsive dance”. My mate Dave the boilermaker just isn’t into that stuff at all.)

For our church, another key strategy will be to urge more men along to our weekly men’s bible study group, where we can encourage one another as Christian men, husbands, and fathers. That’s the place to encourage the “person-to-person challenge” Murrow is promoting.

As an interesting side note, five times more women attend our weekly women’s bible study as men at the Men’s Group. Most of the women are desperate for their husbands to come along – but the guys are typically “too tired” after a long day at work. When we’ve solved that one, we’re going to encourage dads in our church to read the book *Fatherhood* by Tony Payne (Matthias Media) in the hope of refocusing their priorities.

Clearly, there’s much to be done – but at least we’re going to be open about the problem. It’s tempting to simply bury dis-

turbing statistics. It’s easy to make excuses. But we’ve encouraged everyone at our church to keep challenging the ministry team to shape our Sunday church services and our church life in a way that’s authentically “man-friendly”. We’ve invited everyone to give feedback on what’s helpful for the sort of men they want to invite to church events. (If you’re regularly attending your own church *without* your husband – what would have to change to make him feel comfortable? What would he find awkward, or embarrassing? When you work it out, tell your minister.) This is important. And we need to change. “Many have called men back to church,” says David Murrow... “but this is different. We’re calling *the church* back to men.”

Phil Campbell ministers to a mainly female congregation at Mitchelton Presbyterian Church in Queensland. More men are always welcome.

Take a look at David Murrow’s website <http://www.churchformen.com/> (you may even like to order his book on the subject from Amazon.com). (You can read the full text of his article at www.latechurch.blogspot.com)

ap

Christ’s bold, masculine command, “Follow Me!”, has been turned into “Have a relationship with Me”.



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The prophet motive

Melbourne responded when Franklin Graham came to town.

In 1959, there were church choirs and a decorous crowd of 143,750 – the biggest and probably the best-behaved ever at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Last month the music, from the likes of Guy Sebastian and Marina Prior, was louder and much more up-tempo, and Melbourne’s Telstra Dome can’t hold a crowd that size. But the Christian message Franklin Graham preached over the three days of Festival Victoria 2005 was identical to that of his father, Billy Graham, 46 years earlier.

Fresh from adding more than 10 per cent to Hobart’s church-going population the weekend before, Franklin Graham had his sights on religious revival in Melbourne. And while he might not have matched his father’s haul, Melbourne had several thousand new Christians by the time he left for America, minutes after inviting people forward to receive Christ at the final rally.

More than 80,000 people came to the three main rallies, and about 7000 accepted Graham’s invitation to come forward. Festival co-ordinator Paul



**Barney
Zwartz**

Molyneux said 55 per cent, or about 3800, were first-time converts, with the rest people whose Christian faith had drifted who were renewing their commitment.

Before the festival opened in Melbourne, Graham said: “There is a great spiritual need in this country. All of us are made in God’s image, and material things only satisfy so far. People get into drugs and alcohol and sexual relationships, looking for pleasure, and spending more and more of their income to satisfy cravings, only to find it’s not enough. What people are really searching for is a relationship with God, and they don’t know how to find it.”

For decades the Grahams have been pointing the way. Billy Graham is the best-known evangelist of the past century,

still dedicated to the cause though now frail at 86. William Franklin Graham III, 52, the once-rebellious son who got “sick and tired of being sick and tired”, has taken his mantle and ministry.

Billy Graham came to Australia in 1959 and 1969. The 1959 crusade had unprecedented impact and is well remembered nearly half a century later. More than 130,000 people committed themselves to Christ, some 28,000 of them in one day at the MCG. It really changed Australia, said Sydney Anglican Archbishop Peter Jensen, who was converted the first day in Sydney. Theological colleges overflowed and magistrate’s courts emptied, at least for a while.

Theological colleges overflowed and magistrate’s courts emptied, at least for a while.

Australia is very different today, as Franklin Graham understands, having held rallies in the other state capitals in two previous visits. “This is a big city, and it will be a very difficult city. I just have a sense that this city is going to take a lot of prayer.”

Australians are hard to reach with the Gospel, according to Graham. “It may have something to do with history, when so many settlers came out of the penal system with a distrust of God. In Hobart there’s a museum. I was fascinated how those prisoners were forced into religious education, and were severely beaten and punished, all in the name of God.

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Seven years for stealing an umbrella – you could understand how people could have a distrust for the church and a hatred towards God because of the things that happened to them in the name of God.”

Nevertheless, the Graham team left Hobart well satisfied. “They said it was the largest Christian meeting since my father was there in 1959,” Graham says. “Less than 4000 attend church there on Sunday. We had 4000 each night, and had more than 600 people respond to the invitation to receive Christ, so that’s adding over 10 per cent to the church in three days. We feel good about that.”

His Melbourne rallies may not have attracted the same public anticipation as 1959, but the city’s churches were abuzz. Festival coordinator Paul Molyneux said more than 820 churches were involved from almost every denomination, and some 10,000 volunteers were trained, 9000 of them as counsellors for people who come forward to receive Christ.

This meant the festival would have been a success even if no one turned up to the meetings, said the patron, Melbourne Anglican Archbishop Peter Watson, himself a counsellor in the 1959 crusade. “The number of churches involved has caught people by surprise. Even the 9000 going through training is a surge of new life. Just

the Christians coming together, it’s a watershed of encouragement for the churches in a day when it’s needed.”

Gerald Vanderwert, minister at Donvale Presbyterian Church, said his congregation would be richer for being involved – about 25 were counsellors and ushers, and the church sent a busload to the festival. “If you’re a Christian, it’s a



“To see what happened over the three days, and to have more than 800 churches involved, is tremendous.”

challenge and an opportunity to stretch yourself. The motivation is that the Gospel is being preached. For my people who are involved, it’s training in sharing their faith, in counselling, and looking at the wider picture outside their own little circle, and working together with other believers for a common cause,” he said.

It took Franklin Graham a while to want to work with other believers. Billy and Ruth Graham’s fourth child, he notoriously preferred Harleys, whiskey and

women to God before his conversion in 1974. He is a touch defensive about that image today. “That was a long time ago. I wasn’t any worse than anyone else. I didn’t want someone dictating to me what to do with my life. It wasn’t that I didn’t believe in Jesus but I didn’t want him controlling my life. I wanted to be lord of my life, but I found I was messing it up. There was a vacuum and a void, and I was miserable. The more I tried to fill my life with experiences the more unhappy I became. And there are millions in Australia today who are in exactly the same boat.”

His start as an evangelist was highly discouraging. Persuaded by a friend to preach in 1983, he reluctantly agreed – and not one person responded to the Gospel appeal. But six years later, the same friend persuaded him again, in Alaska, and the audience poured down. Since then he has preached to more than 4 million people in 15 countries.

“I felt God was calling me to preach but I resisted it. I didn’t want to be compared with my father, who is a great man. But at the same time I still had a responsibility to my father in heaven. I had to learn that whether someone comes forward or not, that’s not my responsibility. My responsibility is to preach the Gospel, and God takes it from there.”

He finds that a momentum builds

Keeping the faith

Desma Vanderwert’s parents found their lives changed at Billy Graham’s 1959 Melbourne crusade. Ten years later, when the world’s most famous evangelist returned, it happened to her. Last month, as she served as one of the thousands of counsellors helping Franklin Graham over the three days of Festival Victoria 2005, she was used to help it happen in the lives of others.

“I remember as a little girl going to the 1959 crusade at the MCG. My parents were very much influenced by that. We began saying grace at the table, which we’d never done.”

By Graham’s next visit, Desma was 17 and considered herself a Christian, but without assurance of salvation. “Several things he said led me on. I remember him talking of future partners, and I had a

non-Christian boyfriend, and I knew I had to change these areas of my life. And there and then I was assured there was a plan and purpose for my life that required obedience.” (Now she is married to Presbyterian minister Gerald Vanderwert of Donvale, Vic.)

Sydney Anglican Archbishop Peter Jensen and his brother Phillip, Dean of Sydney’s St Andrew’s Cathedral, are among the best known Australians who went forward to receive Christ during Billy Graham’s 1959 crusade. Melbourne Archbishop Peter Watson – now patron of Franklin Graham’s Melbourne visit – was a counsellor at those Sydney meetings.

Peter Jensen recalls: “I was 15, a church-goer but without a personal faith. I was very impressed – I’d never seen such professionalism in Christian ser-

vices.” He went on the first day and was struck by the quality of Graham’s voice, by his continual appeal to and explanation of the Bible, his passion and his challenge.

“You couldn’t drift, you must decide. To me it made absolute sense, it brought together everything I’d been told and demanded action. When he made his appeal I immediately stood up and went forward. My little brother Phillip, who thought only alcoholics and criminals went forward, followed me.”

The future archbishop went back to the crusade 23 times, “almost to the despair of my parents. Billy Graham grounded me in the basics of the Christian faith and challenged me to get into ministry.”

Barney Zwartz 

through a festival, as people saved on the first night bring their friends the next night. He presents the Gospel as simply and clearly as he can, so people understand what they are being asked to do. "The Gospel message is the same whether I'm in Chile, Australia, Moldova or Angola, where I will be later this year. The power of the Gospel is the same, regardless of the culture. My father told me years ago he was in Nigeria and preached John 3:16 as simply as he could. There was a large response." Next month he was at

Cambridge University, preached an identical message and again had a large response. "That's the power of the Gospel. The heart of man is the same. Man is looking for God."

Plenty found Him in Melbourne. This correspondent walked with Graham on the 100-metre journey from the stage to his cavalcade – the only journalist so honoured. Graham was well pleased with the festival. "It's so different from 1959, because at that time maybe 50 per cent of people went to church, but now this

country is unchurched," he said. "To see what happened over the three days, and to have more than 800 churches involved, is tremendous."

Was Melbourne difficult, as he had feared? He said he had been warned it was a conservative city, but in fact he found the audience "very receptive, very warm – delightfully so". In his final address, he praised the festival's chairman, Presbyterian Moderator-General Bob Thomas.

Buses brought people from throughout the suburbs and state youth groups on Saturday night (19 March) and church congregations on the Sunday afternoon, bringing non-Christian friends and family with them. The biggest rally was Saturday night, when singer Guy Sebastian was the "mystery star".

On Sunday the surprise star was the Governor-General, Major General Michael Jeffery, who said he became a committed Christian as a combat commander in Vietnam. "Some of my most intense spiritual moments have been in the steamy heat of the jungle in Borneo, Malaya and Vietnam." Major General Jeffery said the Lord had given him strength and hope throughout his life. "He is there for all of us if we but ask."

Barney Zwartz is religion editor of The Age newspaper. This report is a combined version of the The Age's coverage of the festival. ap

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Letters

Our suppressed women

Re Darren Middleton's letter (*AP*, February), Tracy Gordon's remarks about the Fellowship's views on their women-folk being submissive, gentle and quiet were stated within a context of controlling male dominance. The words of 1 Peter 3 may echo these qualities for godly women but they are also joined to words to the men to be considerate of their wives and to honour them as joint heirs of the grace of life. Nowhere in the New Testament are Christian men given the licence of forcing submission on their wives, rather they are to love their wives as Jesus loved his church so that Christian women may find it natural to practise respectful submissiveness on their part. Maybe many Evangelicals are nearer these apostolic standards in the spirit in which they were intended than some Reformed ministers and elders who suppress the women in their congregations into anonymity.

*Douglas Milne, Principal,
Presbyterian Theological College,
Box Hill, Vic*

Astounded? Me too

David Hare (*AP*, March) is "astounded" at various aspects of my book *Fractured Families: The story of a Melbourne Church Cult*.

Yes, one might like to examine all sides of a topic, but this would be futile when the subject – in this instance the Christian cult known as the Fellowship – repeatedly denies both its existence and any wrongdoing. I explained my position clearly in my introduction. Much investigative journalism falls into this category of telling the other side of a story, particularly when there's a serious imbalance of power, as here. It's a perfectly legitimate approach.

David Hare cannot be allowed to get away with "I am astounded to read what purports to be the theology of myself and my fellow elders in the Presbyterian church". I wrote not about the theology of Presbyterian elders but of the Fellowship, of whom a handful are Presbyterian elders. No attempt to legitimise that theology as Presbyterian, reformed, or even orthodox, will impress those who know Fellowship teaching and

practice.

David Hare may have unwittingly provided two hints of the Fellowship mindset. He says "no man ... has a track record free from mistakes" and admits he is no exception. A poor choice of words? Or a failure to grasp the desperate state of sinfulness (not mistakenness) in which we each find ourselves?

Second, his closing paragraph is suffused with Fellowship-style self-righteousness in lauding the Fellowship founders, and claiming an abundance of good fruit in his family. Such commendation is better left to God.

*Morag Zwartz
Ferntree Gully, Vic*

Fellowship was asked

I write in response to David Hare's claim (*AP*, March) that the Church and Nation Committee did not make any attempt to obtain a balancing view when producing *Fractured Fellowship*. I was a member of the committee at that time and, because of a family friendship with one of the Fellowship ministers, I was asked to ring him and invite him and any others who wanted to do so to meet with the committee. He readily agreed to gather some people together for this purpose. When I rang him later to arrange this meeting he told me they had changed their minds. Unfortunately by the time the booklet came to Assembly there had been a change of convener and the new incumbent was unaware of this approach having been made. However, the Fellowship minister to whom I spoke was a member of Assembly. He could readily have risen to correct this mistake. He chose to keep silent.

*Joan Milne
Burwood East, Victoria*

Teaching and ruling elders.

Colin Gauld (*AP*, March) comments on the title of ministers that "it may not be possible to find an appropriate term". I believe the appropriate term is "teaching elder". 1 Timothy 5:17 states: "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching." Since the elders can be called "pastors" (as Colin Gauld rightly argues from Acts 20:28-31 and 1 Peter 5: 1-4) the minister can be called "the teaching pastor". Actually, "minister" is an abbreviation for

Minister of the Word and Sacraments, and therefore we can also use the abbreviation "pastor" for the teaching pastor. Ruling elders could be addressed as ruling pastors.

While I am on the subject, I present another problem with titles. Since Proverbs 27:2 states, "Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth", how can I call myself Reverend? It's OK for others to use a title of distinction, but according to the Proverb, it is not a title I should use. I find that I am most comfortable with the title given to me by my Korean friends who call me Pastor Robert.

*Robert Herrgott,
Minister,
Ithaca Presbyterian Church, Qld*

A strategic concept

I couldn't help but chuckle at the advertisement for state school chaplains on page 7, February. Until now, I didn't think it was possible to have the words "ecumenical" and "strategic" in the same paragraph.

*Michael Campbell
Mudgee, NSW*

Well clad

Neil Cadman rightly espouses the moral law, but seems to have mixed a human "law" in. In some cultures it is quite appropriate for women to wear "trousers"; in some other cultures men wear "skirts". I actually see trousers as more modest than skirts in some situations.

Otherwise women would need to wear nuns' habits or the complete hijab of extreme Muslims.

*John Yeo
Glen Waverley, Vic*

prayer

APRIL 2005

- 21 Niki Stock, Mission Partners (APWM) worker from Mitchelton, Brisbane, who has been living in the US with her children since the tragic loss of her husband Dale, but hopes soon to return to Pakistan.
- 22 Pray for the Moderator, preachers and filling of the vacancy in Muswellbrook parish NSW Hunter Valley; with about 50 c&a (communicants and adherents), 10 yf (younger folk – Sunday School and youth) and 4 e (elders).
- 23 Pray for the moderator, preachers and filling of the vacancy in Aspendale parish, bayside Melbourne; with about 100 c&a, 30 yf and 7 e.
- 24 In view of the Victorian vilification case, pray that liberty to proclaim Gospel truth may be maintained in our land.
- 25 Wandoan home mission station western Qld; with about 20 c&a, 5 yf and 2 e. Laurie and Gwen Peake.
- 26 The pupils, staff and council of Scotch College, Hawthorn, Melbourne; Gordon Donaldson, Principal, Graham Bradbeer, chaplain.
- 27 Presbytery of Sydney South; 13 parishes and 2 home mission stations totaling 17 congregations with 1185 c&a; 3 department heads, 1 missionary, 4 retired ministers, 4 under jurisdiction, 4 theological candidates; Richard Lee clerk.
- 28 Praise God for 75 years of ministry by PresCare in Qld and pray for its ongoing work among young and older people with many needs; Ray Tuttle CEO.
- 29 Mudgeeraba a "Vision 5 Church Plant" Qld Gold Coast; with about 140 c&a, 40 yf and 3 e. Donald Geddes.

- 30 Somerville parish, southern Melbourne; with about 65 c&a, 10 yf and 2 e. Ian and Heather Brown.

MAY 2005

- 1 Denise Scott Mission Partners (APWM) worker with The Leprosy Mission in Qld .
- 2 Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers in many ministries – maybe from your family or congregation?
- 3 Horsham parish western Vic.; with about 55 c&a, 15 yf and 3 e. John and Michelle Brennan.
- 4 Woy Woy parish north of Sydney; with about 80 c&a, 10 yf and 6 e. Jamie and Jenny Newans.
- 5 Thank God for the 20 strong youth work party at Talua training centre, Vanuatu, and pray for tradesmen to become available in mid year and more young people at the end of the year.
- 6 Len and Wendy, APWM workers from Melbourne serving in an educational role in the Middle East .
- 7 Presbytery of Maroondah, Melbourne; 8 parishes and 1 home mission station totaling 11 congregations with 460 c&a; 1 theological teacher, 5 retired ministers, 2 under jurisdiction, 1 theological candidate; Doug Fraser clerk.
- 8 Whitfords parish, Perth; with about 150 c&a, 75 yf and 6 e. Alan and Iem Perrie, Paul and Melinda Spackman.
- 9 SA General Assembly, meeting at Naracoorte; Reg Mathews moderator, Rupert Hanna clerk – all fellowship, debates and decisions.
- 10 Pray for the Moderator, preachers and the filling of the vacancy in the Bombala home mission station, NSW far south coast; with about 190 c&a,

- 10 yf and 5 e.
- 11 Stuart and Sharon Bonnington as he begins work in Fremantle parish, WA; with about 80 c&a, 10 yf and 4 e and also as Presbyterian Inland Mission Superintendent.
- 12 Robert and Lucy Quinn Mission Partners (APWM) workers from Campbelltown NSW serving with Pioneers in PNG in theological education.
- 13 Andrew and Kerri Purcell as they take up work in the SW Qld PIM patrol based on Charleville.
- 14 Peter and Ruth O Loughlin Mission Partners (APWM) partner society workers from Creek Road, Brisbane serving with International Teams in Austria among refugees.
- 15 Willows church, Thuringowa Qld (adjoining Townsville); with about 95 c&a, 80 yf and 6 e. David and Elizabeth McDougall.
- 16 John Irvin and Bruce Meller as they work together in the NSW Ministry and Mission department.
- 17 Presbytery of Canberra NSW/ACT; 6 parishes and 4 home mission stations totaling 19 congregations with 1520 c&a; 6 retired ministers; Peter Davidson clerk.
- 18 Pray for all those responsible for the wise and godly administration of church finances in church offices and departments.
- 19 Auburn parish, Vic.; with about 35 c&a, 15 yf and 4 e. Trevor and Ann Cox.
- 20 Granville home mission station western Sydney; with about 55 c&a, 5 yf and 6 e. Bruce and Helen Frost, and Steven and Lan Coxhead in the neighbouring Cabravale congregation.

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Books

John Calvin's Ideas

Paul Helm.
Oxford University Press, 2004
Reviewed by Peter Hastie

John Calvin is universally acknowledged as one of the most gifted and influential theologians of all time. In his latest book, Professor Helm has put us all in his debt by doing some ground-breaking work on the philosophical and scholastic sources of some of Calvin's ideas.

Calvin has been frequently regarded as anti-philosophical and opposed to all forms of speculation. However, through a thorough analysis of Calvin's writing, Helm demonstrates that Calvin was thoroughly familiar with a range of philosophical ideas and was willing to use some of them to elucidate his own theological position.

The book is not organised according to traditional theological categories; rather it follows a philosophical order. Thus there are chapters on metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. As well as examining Calvin's theology in its late medieval context, Helm also explores the way in which some modern philosophers have appealed to Calvin in constructing what has become known as "reformed epistemology". Helm is critical of these efforts and shows how wary one must be in trying to read modern philosophical theories, albeit Christian, back into Calvin.

This book is important because it has become fashionable in more recent times to see a significant discontinuity between Calvin and his successors. Calvin's disciples, beginning with Theodore Beza and including the Westminster divines, are frequently portrayed as traitors of Calvin's theology of grace. They are often accused of being rationalistic, speculative and oppressively legalistic. Helm demonstrates that the so-called "discontinuity" is in fact a caricature. He shows that Calvin himself inherited a mindset strongly imbued with medieval scholasticism and was indebted to scholastic and philosophical modes of thought.

The issue of whether Calvin's writings reveal scholastic tendencies is important in the modern debate. If it can be shown that such tendencies exist, then it makes it more plausible to assume that there is doctrinal continuity between Calvin and his successors (who also evince such ten-

dencies). The supposed gap between Calvin and the so-called Reformed scholastics is largely myth.

This is not an easy book to read. It is written for those who are already up to speed on theology and philosophy in the medieval period. But if you read Helm patiently you will be richly rewarded with profound insights into God and how He can be known. I found the chapters on God and the Trinity, Freewill, Divine Accomodation, Natural Theology and the *Sensus Divinitatis*, Revelation and Natural Law hard work but extremely useful. For Calvin scholars, this is certainly a "must-have".

Peter Hastie, minister of Ashfield Presbyterian Church, Sydney, is issues editor of AP.

Serving as Deacons

Peter Barnes.
PTC Media, 2005
Reviewed by Stuart Bonnington

The PTC Media continues to sponsor and produce helpful resources for the Presbyterian Church of Australia. This booklet by AP books editor Peter Barnes (originally produced as a report for the GAA) has been revised, issued with an attractive cover and had a very helpful set of study questions added to it. Anyone exploring the question of deacons in the local church could use *Serving as Deacons* as a very helpful guide. Contact PTC Media on 0400 880 515 for copies.

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

See for Yourself: Gigantic Truths God's Massive Plan

Joan Milne facilitator

Gigantic Truths is the first (of sixteen) parts of *See For Yourself*, a comprehensive Scripture teaching course for students in junior and middle high school years drawing on topics from the Westminster Confession of Faith.

The contributors are Neil Benfell, Natasha Brightwell, John Dekker, Deborah Letcher, Ben Nelson and Cherie Riding contributors. Joan Milne was project facilitator.

Work is well advanced on the other volumes, which will be progressively issued over the next couple of years. Sponsored by the Christian Education and Nurture Committee of the Presbyterian Church

of Victoria and funded by the famous Allen Bequest, *See For Yourself* seeks to "meet the need for Presbyterian-based material" for young people. It succeeds admirably, and the large, ring bound format suits this age groups well. The graphics are attractive, the contents excellent and I believe the prices are going to be very reasonable indeed. *See For Yourself* is destined to circulate far and wide both inside and outside the Presbyterian Church of Australia. Contact PTC Media on 0400 880 515 for copies.

Mysterious Ways: The Providence of God in the Life of Joseph

David Kingdon
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2004.
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

The life of Joseph is a fascinating one, full of drama and meaning for those who take the trouble to study it. David Kingdon tells it simply and well. The lessons are perhaps easier to see in somebody else's life than they are in one's own. Joseph's years of trial and adversity in Egypt were actually years of preparation for God's service. Strangely enough, unlike most of God's saints, Joseph has no outstanding blot on his biography. His main sin is probably a certain priggishness and insensitivity in dealing with his brothers. Yet God ordained that he spend over two years in jail for a crime that he did not commit in order to sanctify him for his later work of bringing his brothers to repentance and, under Pharaoh, leading a pagan nation. God's providence, says Matthew Henry, has "a long reach".

The life of Joseph is an illustration of Thomas Watson's words about trusting God "when providence seems to run quite contrary to promises". Here are nine heart-warming and relevant studies on the life of Joseph, all presented to us in a little work of fewer than 100 pages.

Peter Barnes is books editor of AP.

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Two covenants

To understand the cross we must understand God's covenant.

One of the fundamental themes of the Westminster Confession that many today see as outmoded is its covenantal understanding of the Bible. Few theologians treat it with the seriousness that it deserves, and many, even evangelicals, believe that it is fundamentally incompatible with the thought of John Calvin, the father of Reformed theology.

The reasons why it has been discarded, despite having such strong advocates as B.B. Warfield, W.G.T. Shedd and Louis Berkof in the 20th century, are many and varied. Probably the most potent force behind its gradual disappearance has been the change in understanding of the origin of man that has taken place since Darwin. The growing authority of science has meant that a doctrine rooted in the historicity of Adam has fallen into general disfavour. But there are also voices within the Reformed community who impugn covenant theology on the grounds that it seems to establish man's relationship with God on the basis of law, not grace. Does covenant theology deserve such bad press?

First, let's see why this is an important issue. Covenant theology is the biblical framework in which we understand the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It answers questions like: Why did Jesus have to come to earth? Why did he have to keep the law? Why did he die if he was without sin? Importantly, it explains for whom he lived and died.

The Bible teaches that life can only be explained in terms of a covenant which the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – made between themselves before the world began (John 17:2,4,5). This covenant of redemption included God's choosing of a people to be saved (Eph 1:4 – the elect), the agent of salvation (Eph. 3:11 – Christ) and through whom it would be applied (2 Thess. 2:13 – the Holy Spirit). The essence of this covenant was Jesus' willingness to become our representative and our righteousness through His earthly life of obedience to God's law and His atoning death as a propitiation to appease God's



Darren Middleton

wrath against sin. As a result, the Father conferred a kingdom upon Jesus where He will rule over His elect people (Luke 22:29). Consequently, the eternal covenant finds its expression in redemptive history through two covenants called the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.

A careful reading of Scripture confirms the Confession's teaching that "life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience" (WCF 7:2). Romans 5:12 teaches that Adam was our representative and, as such, entered into a covenant [of works] with God, whereby he was offered eternal life predicated upon his perfect personal obedience. At the same time, there was the possibility of death and judgment if he disobeyed. Scripture teaches us that Adam, our representative, broke the covenant and so sin, death and judgment came upon us all (Hos. 6:7, Rom. 5:12,18, 1 Cor. 15:42-49).

Since we are condemned in Adam as covenant breakers and unable to be justified by the law, the Bible introduces us to a new hope in Genesis 3:15. We are promised someone who would crush Satan's head and as our representative would obey God's commands, keep His covenant and then die for our sin. Reformed theology calls this the covenant of grace.

The covenant of grace, then, spans the whole of redemptive history from Genesis 3:15 till the coming of the Lord. Whereas in the covenant of works salva-

tion was to be merited by works, in the covenant of grace it is received by faith alone in the works of Christ. Though there are many covenants (Noah, Abraham, Moses, David etc), covenant theology teaches that each of these covenants are in fact administrations of the one covenant of grace that reach their fulfillment in Christ as the second Adam. It is through faith in Christ as the second Adam, especially in His life, death and resurrection, that God's people (the elect) receive eternal life.

Importantly, covenant theology teaches that Jesus, as the second Adam, came to save lost sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). His work is not simply to open up the possibility of salvation, but to save completely those who come to God through him (Heb. 7:24ff). That is why the writer of Hebrews can say that by His blood He has obtained eternal redemption for those He represents (Heb 9:12). His intercession for His people never fails (John 17:2,4,6,9; Rom. 8:32-34).

One of the interesting things about those who deny covenant theology is that they can never guarantee that Christ's death actually saves anyone without introducing the heresy of universalism. In dumping covenant theology, they offer us an atonement that doesn't really atone. If Christ died for all men, but all men are not saved, what did His death really achieve? Yet, covenant theology assures us that Christ's atonement definitely atones (Is. 53:11; John 10:11,15). John Owen reminds us that we have only three alternatives: either Christ died for "all the sins of all men, or all the sins of some men, or some sins of all men."

Clearly, if it is the last, none of us will be saved. If it is the second, then Christ's death actually saves the elect as covenant theology teaches. If it is the first, then all men are going to heaven, even those who have chosen not to – a rather strange result, to be sure.

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