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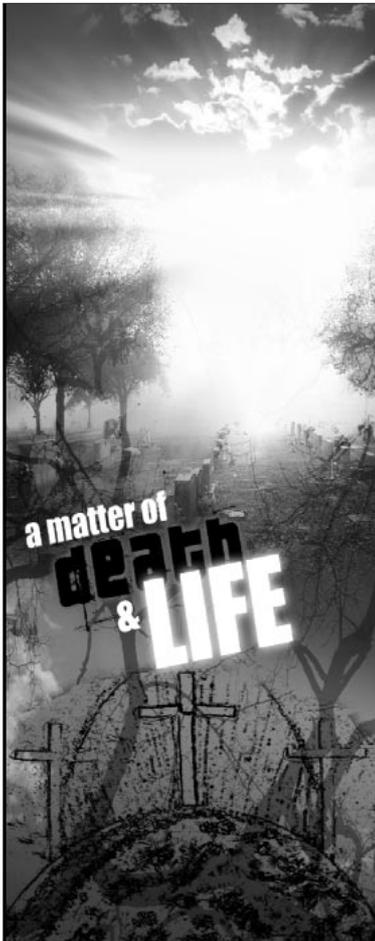
THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

april 2006



Our Scottish heritage

Andrew McGowan • Da Vinci: Be prepared • J. I. Packer



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SCOTTISH HERITAGE

Our founding fathers: Andrew McGowan 4
Boston plea party: Peter Barnes 9
Luther's voice in Scotland: James Edward McGoldrick 11
An ever-burning lamp: Mark Glanville 13

BIBLE STUDY

Harsh lessons
20 Bible studies in Judges 17-21 and Mark 14:1-15:41 15

NEWS

Across Australia 21
Around the World 22
On the Agenda 24

THE DA VINCI CODE

Da Vinci: Be prepared: Stuart Bonnington 25
Debunking the code: Deborah Brunt 27

LETTERS 28

PRAYER 30

BOOKS 31

Unspeakable: Os Guinness
Jesus and Muhammad: Mark A. Gabriel
Awakening: David Robertson
New Life in the Wasteland: Douglas F. Kelly

REFLECTION

Are you serious? J.I. Packer 32

editorial

Some of our readers may be surprised that this month's issue is devoted to the influence of reformed Scottish Christianity. No doubt some will misinterpret such an interest at best as an antiquarian curiosity and at worst an attempt to call up the ghost of John Knox who, in their opinion, is best left buried beneath visitors' carpark space No. 23 outside St Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh. However, refusal to acknowledge the spiritual debt we owe our Scottish forebears is born of a blindness that is unwilling to see the rich legacy that the people in this small country have left us.

Scotland has been the source of many of the greatest blessings to the modern society – penicillin, anaesthetics, the steam engine, the telephone, television and X-rays, to mention but a few of the discoveries and inventions that have enriched our lives. However, arguably of even greater significance has been the influence of the Scottish Reformation upon thought and culture which gave rise to several centuries of innovation and achievement across many disciplines and fields of endeavour.

Scotland was profoundly transformed through the Reformation which took place under John Knox. The country developed a clearer understanding of the Gospel which, in turn, fuelled a missionary impulse across the nation and fired the imagination of political and social reformers. A new emphasis on the glory of God, the dignity of man and a strong grasp of the meaning of the doctrine of justification by faith shaped the development of government in Scotland and other Western democratic nations which shared its heritage.

Nowhere has the influence of the Reformation been greater than in the tremendous drive towards universal education that accelerated under Knox. The Reformation provided a new impetus to learn: everyone had to read so that they could study the Bible. Further, ministers had to be educated so that they could preach intelligent and compelling sermons. By 1600, Scotland had twice as many universities as the rest of Britain. As in Germany under Luther, the impulse for this spiritual and social transformation took place under one man, John Knox. This issue is dedicated to exploring the rich heritage that Knox and other evangelicals in Scotland have left the rest of the world.

Peter Hastie 

Our founding fathers

The Scottish Reformation is the rock from which we are hewn.



Professor Andrew McGowan is a Church of Scotland minister, who serves as the principal of the Highland Theological College in Dingwall, north of Inverness. The college is an academic partner in the University of the Highlands and Islands, a federation of 14 colleges and research institutions.

Dr McGowan obtained his PhD in historical theology from Aberdeen University. His doctoral thesis was published as *The Federal Theology of Thomas Boston*. He has also written *The New Birth*, edited *Women Elders in the Kirk*, published articles in a number of books and academic journals and contributed to a number of reference volumes. He has just completed editing *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*, to be published next month by IVP UK.

Dr McGowan grew up just outside Glasgow. He is married to June, and they have three sons. He has served in various parishes of the Church of Scotland. His first appointment was the most unusual because he had six places of worship where he had to preach and five of them were reached by boat.



Andrew McGowan
talks to
Peter Hastie

He has served as principal of the Highland Theological College since 1994. He lives in Dingwall just 20 minutes walk from the college.

Some have said that before the Reformation hardly a country in Europe was more backward than Scotland. What role did the Reformation play in Scotland's religious and cultural transformation since the 16th century?

First, I am not sure that Scotland was as backward as some modern historians would suggest. If you look at the cultural, political and philosophical parallels between Scotland and France in the pre-Reformation era, then I am not persuaded that these historians have proved their case. Be that as it may, Scotland during this period was an impoverished place in many ways.

I think it's true, however, that the Reformation was the catalyst and driving force behind some tremendous cultural changes in Scotland from the 16th century onwards. Dr Douglas Kelly, of Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, has written a book which looks at the effect of the Reformation on the birth of democracy and modern Western civilisation in a number of different countries. One of them is Scotland. Personally, I think he makes a good case there. Other writers have come to similar conclusions, especially in connection with the Reformation's impact on education.

There is little doubt that the spiritual emphases of the Reformation – especially the concern for biblical literacy – laid the groundwork for educational advance in the 16th and 17th centuries. At the time of the Enlightenment, Scotland was renowned for the quality of its learning. It produced a number of famous thinkers, scholars and scientists. There is no doubt that Scotland has had a huge influence upon the world through its many famous inventors, writers, engineers and doctors – to mention only a few of the professions

where the Scots have made a notable contribution. Many of these achievements can be traced in some ways to elements of the Reformation.

What were the specific aspects of the Reformation that led to this development in Scotland?

I think that one of the most enduring legacies of the Reformation in Scotland has been an emphasis on education. This emphasis is seen not only at the school level; it is also at the higher levels of education as well.

One of the great concerns of the Reformers was the appalling ignorance that marked large parts of society in the pre-Reformation period. Even the educational standards for clergy were quite low. Many of those who led worship had only a very elementary knowledge of the Bible and struggled to lead a church service in Latin. Naturally, these deficiencies led many to realise that a Reformed church had to have educated ministers. In fact, until recently, to be a Church of Scotland minister you had to have studied for at least six years at university. There are exceptions now, but the norm remains six years of academic study. So there was a strong emphasis on education. John Knox, one of the leading figures in the Reformation in Scotland, insisted on having a school in every parish of the country.

Throughout Europe the Scottish education system became famous. Even today there is still a sense that the Scottish education system is a better system than its English counterpart, even at the university level. For instance, in England an honours degree usually takes three years, but in Scotland it takes four. The two systems are quite distinct, even though they have certain common features. Scotland has always retained its reputation for academic rigour and excellence.

Most historians recognise that in no other country did the Protestant faith become as dominant as in Scotland. What did the Protestant Reformers do at a human level to effect such a thorough change?

I'm glad you added "at a human level" because I would clearly understand the Reformation as first and foremost a work of the Holy Spirit.

Having said that, however, I think there were a number of human strategies and initiatives which, under God, were extraordinarily effective in spreading the Reformed faith. First, as I have already mentioned, John Knox wanted to have a

church and minister, as well as a school, in every parish. In Scotland we have been tremendously blessed to have the parish system as one of the by-products of the Reformation. This means that there is no part of Scotland for which a minister is not responsible and where a school has not been planted for the children. I think this one factor alone was responsible for massive cultural and spiritual changes and led to the dominance of the Reformed faith in Scotland. Can you imagine the changes that would come to a country where there was no Christianity if you divided it up into small parishes of only a few miles in circumference and then placed committed believers into each area to preach the gospel and run the schools as thorough-going Christian institutions? I think that over a period of time you would see some very deep and long-lasting changes to the place. That is what happened in Scotland.

An enduring legacy of the Reformation is the emphasis on education. John Knox insisted on having a school in every parish of the country.

Many people today think that the parish system is outdated because our societies have become so mobile. Do you think that the parish system is still relevant in large, urban, multi-cultural environments?

The parish system is certainly breaking down in Scotland at the moment, but I suspect not for the same reasons as in Australia and the USA. Our society in Scotland is not as mobile as the USA and people in general are not prepared to drive half an hour to attend a mega-church as they do there. The parish system is in trouble in Scotland because of a personnel crisis; for instance, in my own denomination, the Church of Scotland, there is a dramatic shortage of ministers at the moment. I heard recently that there were something like 250 to 300 vacant churches in Scotland. That is a crisis in anyone's terms. As a result of this shortage of ministers, most congregations are only being allowed short-term ministerial appointments, which can be ended if a vacancy arises in a neighbouring parish. Presbyteries can then amalgamate churches if the personnel situation doesn't improve dramatically.

One recent proposal to the General Assembly recommended that the church should apportion a number of ministers

to each Presbytery. The Presbyteries would then be left to allocate their allotment of ministers to their areas of greatest need. All of this is deeply damaging to a congregation's right to call and retain their own minister. It represents an erosion of the independence of the local Presbyterian Church. I believe that there is a certain sense of independence at the local level that the Presbytery must respect. I'm rather afraid that these proposals are beginning to undermine the very nature of Presbyterianism.

John Knox is widely regarded as being the greatest of the Protestant leaders of the Scottish Reformation. Why is he generally unappreciated today and branded as a misguided extremist?

I think the reason that Knox is unappreciated and misunderstood today is largely because of ignorance. It is also partly due to the fact that our modern secular culture has difficulty recognising that committed Christians have played a major role in shaping our culture. There is a tendency today to want to rewrite history so that the place of Christianity is diminished. If you go into any primary school in Scotland at the moment and say "name two great heroes of Scottish history", they will almost certainly reply "Mary Queen of Scots and Bonnie Prince Charlie". Actually, these two people would have been utterly disastrous for the country if they had had their way. They were intent on destroying Presbyterianism in Scotland. One of the things that I struggle to understand is how this rewriting of history has been engineered in what is substantially a Presbyterian country.

Why is Knox depicted frequently as a ranting and dogmatic women-hater?

Well, it's largely due to ignorance based on the fact that people are aware that Knox published a book called, *The First Blast Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. However, what they don't know is that that book was written specifically against Mary Queen of Scots, her mother, and Elizabeth I of England. Knox had found that each of these women was frustrating his efforts to establish a Presbyterian Church in Scotland. His book was not a blast against women in general; it was a blast against these three powerful royal women.

Nevertheless it was a theological treatise, and Calvin warned him not to do it.

I know. I'm not saying that it was a smart idea to write the book. Knox may have had second thoughts himself after he reflected on the fall-out. It certainly aroused Elizabeth I's antagonism towards him. She was very reluctant to come to Knox's defence until late in the day, when it was almost too late. I think if he had been a little more polite to her then she would have acted a lot earlier! But remember, he was a bishop in England prior to going to Geneva so he was more respected in earlier days in England than in the later ones. Writing the book might have been a mistake, but I still think many people have been misled by its title into thinking that it was something different from what it actually is.

Did he have good pastoral relationships with women?

Knox seems to have had good personal and pastoral relationships with women but it's not an issue that I have pursued in any depth historically. There are certainly suggestions that at a personal level he enjoyed friendly relations with them. I don't think it is accurate to portray him as a misogynist.

What contribution did Knox make to the spiritual reformation that swept over Scotland?

Knox brought leadership. Perhaps you will recall that while he was still on the continent, the Protestant nobles urged him to come back when the time was right. But then, when he got to Calais, they said "the time is not right; don't come". He was very frustrated by that. It seems that when the Protestant nobles were left to themselves, they vacillated; they were not decisive. I think it was only because there was someone who had the leadership and vision of Knox that the process of reformation was brought through to completion. I don't think any of his contemporaries had the same gifts in the same measure. Of course, it's impossible to say it wouldn't have happened without Knox because the Scottish Reformation involved a spiritual groundswell from the bottom up. The English Reformation began with a king who wanted a divorce, and he imposed it upon the people. But the Scottish Reformation arose among the people and was imposed upon the monarch against her will. So we are talking about two different things. However, the Scottish Reformation wouldn't have happened without Knox or someone very like him.

How do you respond to people who say that John Knox purified Christian worship in Scotland to a point where it became dull, tedious and boring?

Again, I think it's a criticism that is based on sheer prejudice and ignorance. It reveals a lack of knowledge and understanding of *The First Book of Common Order* and *The First Book of Discipline*, which became known as *Knox's Book*. Knox actually had a much more developed and structured understanding of worship than what we see later in Scotland. Actually, what many people regard as traditional Presbyterian worship

There is a tendency in modern secular culture today to want to rewrite history so that the place of Christianity is diminished.

owes more to the Puritan period about a hundred years later than it does to the liturgy developed by Calvin, Knox and others. There are some significant differences between the worship and liturgy that we find during the time of Calvin and Knox

and the type of worship that is characteristic of the later 17th century after the Puritan influence. I think if people went back and studied Knox's liturgy they would be surprised at how developed and structured it is.

What are the principal differences between Knox's view of worship and that of the Puritans?

The Puritans came into being as a protest movement against having to wear vestments and other things. Many of the Puritans had been in Europe and had seen something of what a reformation was like. They had high hopes that when Mary died and Elizabeth came to the throne such a reformation would come to England. They hoped that what had occurred in Zurich and Geneva would take place in their own land. They were terribly disappointed when Elizabeth I wouldn't proceed any further towards a reformation than her father, Henry VIII. She was content with a modified Catholicism. I am sure that if her brother, Edward VI, had lived a lot longer then we would have seen a much more full-blooded reformation in England. Unfortunately, Elizabeth was not of that stamp. Although the English Reformation had a Reformed creed (the Thirty Nine Articles), it didn't go far

enough to satisfy those who had been in Europe and had seen something different with respect to worship.

The problem that the Puritans faced was that because they wanted a purer form of worship, there was a temptation to throw out more than was necessary. Ultimately they wound up with a kind of hymn-sandwich order of service with few responses from the congregation because that was considered Catholic, and so on. Even today, there are few people who really understand the Puritans or have any interest in them. But if you tried to introduce a liturgy that was used by people like Calvin and Knox in many parts of Scotland today, people would say, "that's Catholic; we don't like that." Personally, I think we need to revisit this whole issue of worship with a better historical perspective than many Christians have.

Do you think that Knox went too far on some issues, such as when he wanted to abolish Christmas?

Yes, absolutely. I think he was quite wrong in wanting to abolish Christmas. I was speaking at a ministers' conference last year on Calvin's preaching and many of those who were there would have had a similar view to Knox on this. I thought it was important to point out to them that while Calvin used to preach systematically through books of the Bible in Geneva, nevertheless there were three times during the year when he broke off his preaching series – on Christmas Day, Easter Day and at Pentecost. On those days he preached on the themes of the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit. So yes, I think Knox was out of step with Calvin at those points. Further, I think the New Testament gives us the liberty to celebrate Christmas if we want to.

It has been said that Knox's legacy to Scotland was a reformed Church of Scotland, a social conscience for the poor and the sick, and the best system of education in the West. Do you think that is a fair assessment of his legacy?

Knox's legacy was huge. It certainly includes the idea of a reformed church at the heart of society, the school, the minister, the parish, and the need to care for the poor. But I would also add that Knox made an important contribution to our understanding of the relationship between church and state.

Knox took an especially active role with respect to welfare. Most kirks in

Scotland today still have a benevolent fund, even those in wealthy areas where there is no immediate poverty in the parish. This is a legacy of the Reformation. For many centuries it was the church that cared for the poor, and it was the church that ran the hospitals. No one else did it. It was also the church that ran the schools and took responsibility for education. The Church of Scotland has always had a strong Board of Social Responsibility. We have run homes for orphaned children and for those who have run into trouble with the law. We have been concerned also with drug and alcohol rehabilitation. This sense of social concern goes back to the time of the Reformation. Although the state has taken on much of what the church used to do, it was Knox and his contemporaries who inspired the church to have a social conscience.

How much do Presbyterians around the world owe to John Knox?

We owe John Knox more than we imagine. Sadly, the vast majority of Presbyterians have forgotten what that is. I sometimes think that we need to have a Mel Gibson film on John Knox before people will understand how significant he was. The story of his life is so dramatic. You'll remember, that Knox was one of George Wishart's bodyguards. He provided protection for the Scottish martyr. When Wishart was summoned to St Andrews to face his death, he turned to the young Knox and said, "John, go back to your family; I'll go on from here alone." Wishart was executed in St Andrews, and Knox lived to fight another day.

After the fall of St Andrews, he was forced to serve on the galleys for several years, then he went to France and on to Switzerland and Geneva. I really think Knox's life would make a marvellous film. Actually, I was talking to a film maker last summer when I was on holidays and I told him that Knox's life provided the basis for a tremendous script. I'm hopeful that somehow his legacy will be recovered. Nations go through periods of forgetfulness. Did you know that 2010 is the 450th anniversary of the Reformation in Scotland? Perhaps someone might just get the idea to make a film.

In May 1982, Professor John McIntyre, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, welcomed Pope John Paul II to Scotland. Do you think that Knox would have been happy with

today's ecumenical movement and its direction?

I don't believe Knox would have been happy about the current ecumenical direction, but not for the reasons that many Presbyterians may think. Actually, Calvin and Knox had quite an ecumenical spirit and were happy to discuss and enter into dialogue with theologians from other church traditions. I think we should be willing to do the same today with Catholics and other churches, even if understood as part of the evangelistic task. I don't think we should be afraid of that.

However, the problem with the ecumenical movement is that it does not do that. It does not present a genuine oppor-



If you introduced a liturgy that was used by people like Calvin and Knox today, people would say "that's Catholic; we don't like that".

tunity for different perspectives to engage and dialogue with one another in the pursuit of a clearer understanding of the truth. Instead, the modern ecumenical movement uses theology in a dishonest way. Whereas the purpose of theology is to bring clarity to a discussion and to see what the Scriptures say, the ecumenical movement has used theology as a means of finding a common set of words which different people can use to mean entirely different things. So many of the theological statements that come out of ecumenical forums are entirely dishonest because they have been deliberately constructed to find a form of words that will satisfy as many people as possible without dealing with the underlying issues. Then everyone proclaims a certain unity that doesn't exist in reality. I detest it when theology is used to cover-up error and to mask divisions.

Apart from John Knox, who are the other great theologians of Scottish church history?

I can think of several names such as Andrew Melville, Samuel Rutherford and Thomas Boston. But I think Melville is one of the great forgotten ones.

Andrew Melville is significant because he was really the architect of the

Presbyterian Church in Scotland. John Knox, like leaders in other mass movements, needed someone to systematise the new church structure and make it work. Knox was brilliant as an initiator, but he needed someone who could formalise the new relationships that were developing between church and state.

When we think about Melville's contribution we need to remember that there are only four models of church/state relationships. The first of these has the church controlling the state and that was the model of the medieval Papacy. You might remember that the Pope even excommunicated Elizabeth I at one point and told all her subjects that they no longer needed to obey her. The second model is where the state controls the church. This is the English model where the sovereign is the head of the church and any decisions need to be ratified by an Act of Parliament. In England, for example, the Queen appoints the bishops. The third possibility is where you have a separation of church and state. This is the view that has taken root in America. Whether the Supreme Court has correctly understood what the founders originally intended with this model is a matter of debate, but it represents the third option.

However, in Scotland we find a different model which has certain advantages over the others. This fourth model says that both church and state are institutions appointed by God which owe duties and responsibilities to each other. And so, for example, a minister or church can't appeal from the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to the secular courts. So the state recognises the total liberty of the church within its own sphere of operation. The church also shows loyalty to the state. The monarch sends a High Commissioner to the General Assembly, who is welcomed. There is a loyal message sent to the Queen. There is a relationship there that is not like the other three, which I think is extremely beneficial. Melville was the architect of this.

You mentioned Thomas Boston. Why do you regard him as such an important figure for Presbyterians today?

First, I think he is a model as a preacher in the way he opens up and applies the Scriptures. I think that he is also a model pastor-theologian. Theology is sometimes an arid and academic discipline which seems remote from life and the church. I reject that separation. Theology must arise from the church. I think Boston is a

model of how to be a pastor-theologian and how to have academic concerns which are also applied pastorally.

I think also that he is a good model for us of a gracious, courteous and sensitive representative of Reformed theology. Sadly, many people within the Reformed community come across as if they are negative and angry with everyone. Being Reformed isn't about being anti-Catholic, anti-Arminian, anti-Billy Graham, anti-this, anti-that, and so on. Sadly, many within our community give this impression to the world. But Thomas Boston was a very positive, gracious, and committed covenant theologian. I think he is a marvellous advertisement of how the power of Reformed Christianity can produce the highest qualities of character in us.

Do you think that if you believe that Christ died only for the elect, it makes you an ineffective evangelist?

No, I don't think that follows at all. From time to time people have claimed that if you believe in covenant theology, then you cannot be an effective evangelist. It is claimed that if you believe that God has decided everything anyway, then there is no incentive to evangelise properly. I don't think this follows. The witness of Boston's ministry clearly indicates that he was an effective evangelist. The fact that people came to Christ through hearing his preaching as well as the influence of his books, indicates that there is no incompatibility between being a covenant theologian and an effective evangelist. And if anyone was ever in any doubt about whether you could be a Calvinist and a good evangelist, then they would need to explain why Spurgeon was so successful. He certainly believed in election and particular redemption.

In the 20th century many of Scotland's theologians looked to the teaching of Karl Barth to provide a path for a new Reformation within the church. Has Barthian theology delivered on its promise, and if not, what has gone wrong with it?

No, Barthian theology has failed to deliver what it promised because of a number of fundamental problems. One of these is Barth's incarnational understanding of the atonement.

Barthians by and large reject any notion of penal substitution. When you ask them what role Christ plays in our salvation, they will say something like this: in the incarnation God and humanity have

come together in the very person of Christ, and in a sense, reconciliation between God and humanity takes place in Christ's person. A prerequisite of that is that Christ had assumed fallen humanity. So fallen humanity and divinity come together in the person of Christ and reconciliation takes place in Christ. And then the question comes, "How can I be saved?" And the answer is, "by being united with Christ". When I am united to Christ, I share in that reconciled humanity. Most of the emphasis is on the incarnation, rather than on the cross. Further,

We need a Mel Gibson film on John Knox before people will understand how significant he was. The story of his life is so dramatic.

the doctrine of penal substitution is emptied of any real significance, although sometimes the language is still used. So for me, that is a fundamental problem. The issue of Scripture is also a problem. I think Barth is wrong here because he confuses the inspiration of Scripture with its illumination. There are other areas where I think his theology has let us down too.

On the other hand, some of Barth's insights on the Reformed Confessions are profound and his defence of the orthodox doctrine of God and the Trinity is very helpful. So I think there is a lot in Barth that we can learn from, but there is a lot that went very wrong.

How would you assess the state of the Scottish church today, and what are the problems which it faces?

The Church of Scotland, of which I'm a minister, is in a weakened state. There is a lack of clarity in the preaching of the gospel and the teaching of the Scriptures. This is even true of a few evangelicals, some of whom have a rather negative view of confessional matters. Many of the Church of Scotland ministers who would preach the gospel are not committed to a Reformed Calvinistic theology. The church has major problems in every area – dwindling membership, shrinking finances and a dearth of manpower. However, I think the most serious problem is a lack of vision and hope.

Just before I went to Leicester to the ministers' conference in 2004, I was speaking at Greenville Seminary in the USA, and the ministers I met there

believed that their churches were going to grow. They were planning for growth because they believe that churches are meant to evangelise and disciple people. I didn't get that at Leicester. You get people saying, "we are in a day of small things; we must hold the line; we must stand firm in the midst of a dark world." I hear the same thing in the Church of Scotland. There is a lack of vision, a lack of hope. If you look at the census that comes out every 10 or 15 years, since 1984 we have lost something like 300,000 people from the membership of the Church of Scotland.

I remember that when I was at school, the Church of Scotland had something like 1.2 million members. It is now 600,000 and falling rapidly. Most of the churches are the same. I once started up a study group at Rutherford House and invited a representative from each denomination to give an assessment of trends within their own denomination. There was not one who said we are optimistic, we are growing, we are positive – not one. So I think that is the overriding problem. People don't believe the churches are going to grow. The churches are largely full of elderly people and there is a deep pessimism in Scotland. The only way in which we can face up to these problems, is to get back to the basics of evangelism and teaching.

Finally, are there any signs of a spiritual recovery in the Church of Scotland emerging?

There are a few signs. Eric Alexander says that in the 1950s when he was training for the ministry, the evangelicals in Trinity College, Glasgow, could have met in a telephone box. Clearly, some things have changed considerably. There have been times in the 1980s when evangelicals have certainly been in the majority of candidates training for the ministry. The evangelical movement within the Church of Scotland, which was built up by men like William Still, James Phillip, George Phillip and Eric Alexander, has about 400 members today. We also recently launched a new movement called, Forward Together, which is an attempt to gather evangelicals together within the Church of Scotland. Forward Together has a much more political sense of itself. If there are issues coming up at the General Assembly, then we will prepare for that and we will ensure that there is an agreed evangelical position where somebody will move a motion and somebody will second it. We want to move together. ap

Boston plea party

Few preachers have the power or persuasion of Thomas Boston.

Thomas Boston (1676-1732) used to be one of the best-known names in evangelical circles, especially in Scotland. George Whitefield may have addressed his thousands in the open air each week, but Boston only ever served in two small parishes – Simprin and Ettrick. At Ettrick, Boston bewailed his fate: “My circumstances are extremely heavy: they seem to have little desire for the gospel.”

Only after almost a decade of gospel preaching did Ettrick begin to respond. Temperamentally, Boston considered himself “naturally bashful, timorous, and much subject to the fear of man”. He lamented this reserve: “My natural bashfulness and diffidence has often done me much harm. Melancholy is an enemy to gifts and grace, a great friend to unbelief, as I have often found in my experience.” The study of Boston may thus be a particular encouragement for apprehensive pastors who labour in relatively small parishes with many unresponsive persons in the congregations.

Boston viewed preaching in exalted terms: “I saw the preaching of Christ to be the most difficult thing; for that though the whole world is full of wonders, yet here are depths beyond all.” Above all else, Boston sought to be a preacher. Even as he was dying and unable to preach from his pulpit at Ettrick, Boston gathered his flock together and preached the last two sermons of his earthly life, on 2 and 9 April 1732, from a window in the manse. A preacher had to be earnest about his preaching, or else he would be no preacher. Boston prayed: “Lord, rather strike me dumb, than suffer me to preach unconcerned for the good of souls; for if dumb, I should murder neither my own soul, nor those of others.” “The devil,” wrote Boston, “shames such preachers. He goes about like a roaring lion, ... and they ... creep about like a snail.”

Therefore, Boston had much to say about the preacher himself: “A dead man cannot follow any person; a dead preacher cannot follow Christ; there must be a principle of life, spiritual life in him, or else he is naught.” Boston well realised



Peter Barnes

the need for personal holiness. As he put it: “It is hard to play, when the instrument is not in tune.” He had the woeful experience of preaching on certain subjects, only for those very sins to grip him.

Given this need to be holy, Boston wrestled with sin and strove after righteousness. He lamented: “It is strange that there is scarcely one Sabbath morning wherein I have not deadness to wrestle with, either when I arise, or ere I go out.” Before deciding to publish his sermons, Boston felt beset by temptations to vanity in 1712, and underwent a crisis that led him to seek more earnestly after holiness. He recorded: “I think I never had a more solid and serious sense of the absolute need of Christ for sanctification than this day.”

The preacher must be a Christian before he is a preacher. To cite Boston himself: “It is good for all, especially ministers, to be emptied of themselves, and to have Christ and the good of souls before their eyes.”

There have been few preachers in Christendom more searching than Thomas Boston. He saw the need to convict dead consciences of sin. Hence he warned preachers that “if ever thou be taken up with exercised consciences, have a care that thou do not apply the cure before the wound be deep enough.” He added that “there must be used some legal terrors and law-threatenings to drive the fish into the net”. Noting Isaiah 58:1 (“Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression”) and Ezekiel 2:7 (“thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will for-

bear”), Boston warned against the temptation of bringing people on little by little by being smooth. He remained convinced that “there is need of a digging deep for a thorough humiliation in the work of conversion, Luke VI.48”.

Despite his natural timidity, Boston in the pulpit was fearless in seeking to arouse a consciousness of sin. This was because he saw the doctrine of man’s natural state as the foundation of all real religion. Boston asked: “Can a man get a right view of himself as in a state of wrath, and not be pierced with sorrows, terrors, and anxiety?” He could be pungent indeed: “Do you not hear the law denouncing a curse on you for all you are doing, even for your obedience, your prayers, your tears, your reformation of life ... because, being under the law’s dominion, your best works are not so good as it requires them to be under the pain of the curse?”

Boston is at his best in uncovering the human heart. This is seen when he describes the distinguishing marks of the true Christian – something that he regarded as “one of the most difficult parts of preaching”. With ample Scriptural backing, Boston portrays the true Christian as one who worships God in heart, soul, spirit, and body (Rom. 1:9; John 4:24; 1 Cor. 6:20), from a sense of discerning His commandments (Rom. 14:23; Ps. 119:115; John 5:30) out of love (Heb. 6:10; 2 Tim. 1:7) and good-will (Eph. 6:7; Isa. 64:5) for His honour and glory (1 Cor. 10:31) in the Spirit (Eph. 6:18; Jude 20). Boston was too steeped in Scripture to be content to describe a Christian simply as someone who had invited Jesus into his life.

Yet we should not be left with the impression that Boston worked on his congregations in the same way that a hammer works on an anvil. Boston took time to deal with those who possessed an overscrupulous conscience. In order to know whether one is regenerate, one need not know the precise time of conversion, nor is perfection the mark of a true Christian. Pointing to 1 John 2:13-14, Boston affirmed: “There are saints of several sizes in Christ’s family.” If someone were to object that his temptations were

Boston affirmed: “There are saints of several sizes in Christ’s family.”

great, Boston cited Psalm 73:13 to demonstrate the blasphemous temptation that afflicted even the Psalmist. If one were to note one's strange and unusual afflictions, Boston could point to the example of Job, and to the teaching of 1 Peter 4:12, to show that the regenerate could be called upon to endure great hardship.

As searching as Boston could be, especially in calling for rigorous self-examination of the soul, he never lost sight of the need to proclaim Christ freely to the neediest of sinners. He understood the human heart: "I saw it was in vain to attempt to empty the heart of what is its carnal choice, unless I got it filled with something better than what I was to take from it." The free offer of grace goes out to every man, woman and child: "God excludes none from the benefits of the gospel that will not exclude themselves; it is free to all." He urged sinners to "come speedily to Jesus Christ: he has cleansed souls as vile as yours". In short, Boston sought to be fearless in proclaiming both the searching nature of the law of God and the free graciousness of the mercy of God.

In preparing his sermons, Boston wrote them out in full. He regarded that

as "a yoke which often since that time I would have been glad to have shaken off, but could not get it done". While Boston lamented his bondage to this practice, it undoubtedly helped to clarify his thinking and to develop his talent for the memorable turn of phrase.

Boston's preaching was possessed of a certain memorable quality. In his first work, *The Art of Man-Fishing*, he occasionally overloads his sentences and mixes his metaphors. For example, he writes of the unconverted as fish that are unmindful of Satan's hook: "natural men drink in sin

greedily, as the ox drinketh in the water ... They play with it, as the fish with the bait; but, Oh! alas, when they take the serpent in their bosom, they mind not the sting ... Alas! they are poor blinded souls; they see the bait, but not the hook; and therefore it is that they are even seen as it were dancing about the mouth of the pit; there-

**Of complain-
ers, Boston
said some wish
to go from
Delilah's lap
to Abraham's
bosom.**

fore rush they on to sin as a horse to the battle, not knowing the hazard." There are too many images here, and even the most poetic of minds is overtaxed by the fish, oxen, serpents, and horses, in water, in the bosom, about the mouth of the pit, and in battle. As Matthew Henry used to say: "overdoing is undoing."

Before too long, however, Boston was able to develop his gift for vivid illustrations, and a memorable turn of phrase. In describing the proud, Boston declared that "those men are such a spectacle of commiseration, as one would be who had set his palace on fire, and was glorying in a cottage which he had built for himself out of the rubbish, though so very weak, that it could not stand against a storm". In short, "they that were brought up in scarlet do now embrace dunghills".

Man in the state of nature is said to be like the eye – it sees many things but never itself. His heart is like an ant's nest where God need only remove the stone on top to allow Satan to stir it up. In describing the eternity of hell, Boston says that a bird removing a grain of dust every thousand years would eventually remove a mountain – but hell would still remain forever.

Succinct summaries are Boston's specialty. For example, "the sum of our natural religion is, to do good from and for ourselves (John 5:44); the sum of the gospel religion is to do good from and for Christ (Phil. 1:21)". The act of justification is set out in a most memorable way: "God the Father takes the pen, dips it in the blood of His Son, crosses the sinner's accounts, and blots them out of His debt-book." Union with Christ is described in no less vivid terms: "Christ takes the soul, as one marries a widow under a burden of debt: and so when the creditors come to Christ's spouse, she carries them to her Husband, confesses the debt, declares she is not able to pay, and lays all upon Him."

In *The Crook in the Lot*, Boston addressed those who complained about the trials and tribulations of this world: "Will nothing please you but two heavens, one here, another hereafter?" Some, said Boston, wish to go from Delilah's lap to Abraham's bosom.

Preaching is learnt by imitation more than anything else. Boston was a preacher who sought to conform to Christ in all things, apply that to himself and to his congregation, and do so in a memorable way. We all would do well to imitate him.

Peter Barnes is minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, Sydney, and books editor of AP.

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Luther's Scottish voice

The martyred Patrick Hamilton introduced Reformation teaching.

By 1560, after much political and religious strife, the Protestant faith in its Reformed expression had achieved commanding influence in Scotland, under the leadership of John Knox. Before Knox, however, several Protestants, some of a Lutheran persuasion, were laying the foundation for the Reformation in their homeland.

Prominent among them was Patrick Hamilton, a blood relative of the reigning House of Stuart, which remained staunchly Roman Catholic when evangelical teachings appeared in the kingdom. A Frenchman named De la Tour had introduced Luther's doctrines about 1523, but information about him is scant. For this he paid with his life after returning to France in 1527. The New Testament in the English translation of William Tyndale began to circulate in Scotland at about the same time.

Although Parliament had forbidden the reading and distribution of Luther's writings, they continued to appear alongside Tyndale's New Testament, especially in Edinburgh and St Andrews. This occurred at a time when outspoken criticism of corruption and ignorance among Catholic clerics had become frequent. Patrick Hamilton joined the chorus of complainants, and, because of his family's social prominence, his protests would not be ignored.

Hamilton himself, ironically, was a product of ecclesiastical corruption, for his relatives subsidised his education through *commendam*, a practice by which a person could enjoy income from a church office without performing the duties it entailed. With that support, Hamilton studied at the University of Paris, where he received the Master of Arts in 1520. There he became acquainted with Lutheran ideas, but he did not at that point embrace them. Hamilton was still content to assail ignorance and corruption within the church, and was not yet ready to adopt beliefs contrary to its teachings.

Upon his return to the University of St Andrews in 1523 to teach undergraduates, Hamilton irritated faculty colleagues by making bold proposals to improve education proposals that

reflected poorly on their established methods. A backlash against him included a baseless charge of heresy, which may have encouraged him to investigate Luther's position carefully. When Archbishop James Beaton joined his opponents, Hamilton fled to Germany to avoid arrest.

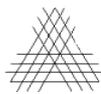
There, through association with Luther and Philipp Melancthon, he became a Protestant and soon thereafter obtained a faculty position at the new University of Marburg, an institution founded upon Luther's understanding of the gospel.

While teaching at Marburg, Patrick Hamilton composed *Dyvers Fruitful Gatherings of Scripture Concerning Fayth and Workes*, the first theological writing of

a Scottish Protestant. The English reformer John Frith translated it from Latin about 1532. In its English version, it soon became known as *Patrick's Places*. It is a treatise about salvation, emphasising Luther's teaching about the relationship between the law and the gospel as the means to reveal man's sin and God's remedy for it. Like his German mentor, Hamilton considered justification through faith alone the heart of the gospel, the article by which the church would stand or fall.

A comparison of *Patrick's Places* with Luther's *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520) shows clearly how the young Scotsman relied upon the Wittenberg professor. Influences from Melancthon's *Loci communes* (1526) and Tyndale's *Parable of the Wicked Mammon* (1527) are also evident, all of which explain justification sola fide (through faith alone) in the Lutheran manner. These Reformers understood law and gospel to be means of revelation that run parallel to each other throughout the Bible. God's law in both the Old Testament and the New Testament commands obedience and good works and pronounces condemnation on all who fail to comply, that is, on the whole human race. The gospel, on the other

James Edward McGoldrick



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hand, proclaims the work of Christ, who has suffered the penalty for sin to satisfy God's justice and to pardon all who repent and receive him through faith alone.

In typical Lutheran fashion, Patrick Hamilton maintained that the proper distinction between the law and the gospel is indispensable for the correct understanding of Scripture. He also regarded Christ as the heart and soul of divine revelation. Hamilton introduced his treatise by citing the Ten Commandments, and then referred to Jesus' summary of the law as recorded in Matthew 22:37-40 (love for God and love for one's neighbors). He asserted that love for God is the reason for obeying the commandments, and that love comes from saving faith in Christ.

He demonstrated this by a series of logical syllogisms and concluded that no one has the natural ability to love God and his neighbors adequately. Without the Holy Spirit and faith, he wrote, it is impossible "to keep any of the commandments of God". Although God's law is the perfect standard, "the law commands us to do what is impossible".

The function of the law is "to make you know that you are but evil, and that there is no remedy to save you in your own ability; and that you may seek remedy from some other". That remedy is Jesus Christ, and the gospel is the affirmation of forgiveness through faith in him alone: "The law says 'where is your righteousness, your goodness and satisfaction?' The gospel says 'Christ is your righteousness, your goodness, your satisfaction'. The law says 'you are bound and obliged to me, to the devil, and to hell'. The gospel says 'Christ has delivered you from them all'."

After establishing the fact of human sinfulness, Hamilton explained in some detail the doctrine of justification sola fide, which is the central theme of his essay. He regarded saving faith as a gift from God, the only means by which a person can believe the gospel and trust in Christ for salvation. No human can produce faith. It is not a faculty one may employ at will, and it is not merely subscription to traditional Christian dogmas.

Hamilton denied that his doctrine of salvation by grace alone disparaged good works.

It is personal, being trust in and reliance upon Jesus Christ alone for salvation. He is a Saviour who actually saves; people do not save themselves or contribute to their salvation.

Because Patrick Hamilton, like Martin Luther and all the Reformers, declared salvation to be a free gift from God, he derided the medieval teaching that good works are meritorious in obtaining divine favor. As Scotland's first Protestant theologian stated the matter, "Whoever thinks to be saved by his works denies that Christ is his Saviour, that Christ died for him, and that all things pertain to Christ. For how is he your Saviour, if you might save yourself by your works, or whereto should he die for you, if any works might have saved you?"

Hamilton's vigorous insistence that only God worked salvation was fully compatible with Luther's declaration in his Small Catechism: "I believe that I cannot, by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus my Lord, or come to him; but his Holy Spirit has called me through the

gospel, enlightened me by his gifts, and sanctified me and preserved me in the true faith."

Again like Luther, Hamilton denied that his doctrine of salvation by grace alone disparaged good works. Indeed, he urged his readers to be zealous in good works, but not in order to win forgiveness or to gain eternal life. Good works are wholesome consequences of saving faith.

Patrick Hamilton returned from Germany in 1527 and preached Lutheran doctrine at St Andrews, ignoring the danger that that entailed. When Catholic authorities arrested him on a charge of heresy, he denounced the idolatrous use of images in worship and denied that the Virgin Mary and the saints are heavenly intercessors. He scorned the doctrine of purgatory and called the pope Antichrist. He told his interrogators that all people must have access to the Word of God, so that they may "know their sins and repent of the same, whereby they may amend their lives by faith and repentance and come to the mercy of God by Jesus".

Patrick Hamilton was condemned for heresy. He perished in flames outside the gate of St Andrews University on February 29, 1528. His final recorded words are: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit! How long shall darkness overwhelm this realm? How long will you allow this tyranny of men?"

God's answer was "Not long!" A small band of Lutherans continued the work of reformation until George Wishart introduced Calvinism into Scotland in 1544. Calvinism soon eclipsed, but did not silence, Luther's voice in Scotland.

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An ever-burning lamp

McCheyne shone briefly but brightly.

Why is Robert Murray McCheyne revered by evangelicals as one of Scotland's greatest? After all he died aged 29, in 1843, had only eight years of ministry and he spent much of this time sick in bed.

Is it the passion he had for foreign missions? Or his role in rekindling interest in evangelism to Jews? Is it his read-the-Bible-in-a-year program devised for his Dundee parishioners, used and re-used today, for example in Carson's *For the Love of God* devotional series? Is it the strong stand he took against moderatism? The great revival in his church? Or the lucidity of his preaching and published sermons?

Perhaps all of these. But there were others worthy of interest, yet the attention is showered on McCheyne. Hundreds still visit his grave at St Peter's Dundee every year. McCheyne is remembered – he stands out from the crowd like a diamond in coal – because he was a pastor who knew his Lord.

Spurgeon writes that holiness is a minister's chief necessity. Like Spurgeon, McCheyne considered that ministry is useless without it. He wrote: "The greatest need of my people is my own holiness." McCheyne tenaciously pursued the Lord.

He longed all his life for a greater love of God, a deeper fear of God, a greater filling of the Spirit and a more heartfelt service. He thought of Moses, who experienced the Lord with such fiery intensity that his face glowed! He thought of Peter, who replied to Jesus with all of his heart, "you know that I love you". He thought of Jeremiah's zeal for the honour of God: "His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot."

It seemed to his friends that McCheyne's desire to taste and see the goodness of the Lord was fulfilled. His best friend and biographer, Andrew Bonar, writes that, early on in McCheyne's ministry at St Peter's Dundee, the congregation felt that their minister had a uniquely intimate relationship with God. One minister friend remarked that holiness seemed to come



**Mark
Glanville**

easy to Robert Murray McCheyne. Yet all his life McCheyne longed to go deeper. His awareness of the holiness of God gave him a constant awareness of his own sinfulness. He wrote to a friend: "Pray for me, for I am a poor worm, all guilt and all helplessness."

McCheyne wrote a revealing instruction to a nearby evangelical minister: "Be often in the presence of God." By this



With the grit of Stephen, McCheyne stood before the stone-brandishing crowd. And like Stephen he spoke with wisdom and the Spirit.

McCheyne did not mean that a Christian can be completely absent from God, or empty of the Spirit of God. But McCheyne was convinced that to kneel before the Father in prayer and to read and delight in the law of the Lord brought a particular intimacy with God. And these moments of intimacy were his happiest moments.

So McCheyne would rise at 6am and dedicate the first two hours of the day to prayer and to scripture. He commonly read three chapters of Scripture each day. He also communed with the Lord after dinner, and then again before bed. Of course devoting the top and tail of the day to the Lord like this was the habit of the Levites of King David's time, who stood to praise the Lord both morning and evening! (1 Chronicles 23).

Bonar writes that McCheyne would stand after dinner and watch the glowing sunset. As he did he would speak of the

Sun of righteousness, or the joy of angels in His presence, or the blessedness of those whose sun can go no more down, until his face shone with gladness as he spoke. Bonar writes: "His lamp was always burning."

McCheyne made war on the philosophy of moderatism which reduced the Christian faith to morality and acceptable conduct. Sin, judgment, repentance and atonement were considered out of date. Moderates often despised evangelicals such as McCheyne.

So McCheyne would preach unwelcomed in parishes where he feared the gospel was never heard. One time, in the final year of his life, as Robert Murray McCheyne stood up to preach he expected to be injured. The people who had assembled in that town had resolved with one another to hurl stones at him as soon as he began to speak.

With the grit of Stephen, McCheyne stood before the stone-brandishing crowd. And like Stephen he spoke with wisdom and the Spirit. From McCheyne's very first words the crowd listened intently to his message. Stones dropped unthrown to the ground as the people hung on every word McCheyne flung their way! And when he had said all he had planned to say they begged him to continue! Bonar writes that it was not his words, but the earnestness and seriousness with which he spoke that arrested those who heard him.

Indeed McCheyne himself held earnestness and seriousness to be the chief human factor for successful ministry – earnestness and seriousness before God. God's workers must ask themselves: How well do I know God? How do I delight in Him? How deeply do I treasure His love? Do I confess my sins with tears? How tenaciously do I cling to the cross? On the six-year anniversary of his ministry in Dundee, McCheyne cried out to his congregation: "Oh, oh learn what need there is that ministers be filled with the Holy Ghost, that they may be converting ministers – that, like John, they may 'turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just'."

We can see the importance of a Christian worker's walk with the Lord in this: McCheyne ministered to others in the same ways that God had ministered to him. He observed the ways in which God had tended to and nurtured him and he watered and trained other vines in the same manner. For this reason he considered that his own personal spiritual growth was critical for his ministry. So "the greatest need of my people is my own holiness".

Like many evangelicals in Scotland at this time, McCheyne prayed for revival. He yearned that those in his church and parish who were outside Christ would come to the Saviour. And he yearned that the Spirit would renew Christians to a vibrant spiritual life. He regularly led the Dundee congregation to pray that showers of revival might fall. Every Thursday evening the prayerful gathered and McCheyne read examples of the powerful activity of the Lord in past revivals. Prayer then followed. McCheyne believed that God would certainly bless a faithful, prayerful ministry.

McCheyne preached for revival. His preaching was arresting. The holy manner in which he spoke and the seriousness with which he spoke of divine things was compelling. Martyn Lloyd Jones relates that even as McCheyne entered the pulpit, before he had uttered even a single word, the congregation would begin to weep silently. McCheyne secretly called upon God for power as he

preached. Bonar notes that he was in the habit of writing short prayers at the top of sermon manuscripts: Master, help! Help, Lord, help! Send showers; Pardon, give the Spirit and take the glory. The awe of God's presence was on the people.

It was during McCheyne's absence, under the ministry of another, William C. Burns, that showers began to fall on Dundee from the windows of heaven. People who had been hard, softened and turned in their hundreds to Christ. And the Lord stirred many walking in half-hearted belief to true devotion. Upon McCheyne's return the revival continued. When the Presbytery of Aberdeen sought to determine the validity of the revival, McCheyne wrote that 600 to 700 people had spoken with ministers about their salvation.

Why did God bring revival in McCheyne's absence? Bonar suggests that God "meant to show that he did not need the help of any person".

At this time evangelical ministers throughout Scotland were praying for revival. The Lord brought revival to other towns: Abernethy, Kilspindie, Errol and Collace. These revivals were an important

part of the great influence the gospel was having in Scotland by the Spirit's power.

McCheyne had spent much of his time in ministry sick with fever. In 1843 he caught a particularly bad dose of typhus when this disease was raging through Dundee. McCheyne went to be with his Saviour as his sun was just beginning to rise – in March 1843. He had walked with the Lord for less than 12 years.

His best friend Andrew Bonar wrote a deeply inspiring account of his life a year after his death, *Memoirs and Remains of R. M. McCheyne*. This remains one of the great works of Christian literature.

These reflections leave one with the feeling that many of the evangelicals of those days were greater men and woman than those of today. They were men and women of whom Malachi's description of the faithful priest is true: "My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity."

Let us then listen to McCheyne's cry: "Oh see what need there is that ministers be filled with the Spirit – that, like John, they be 'in the Spirit on the Lord's day' – That Christ's people may be kept 'like a lamp that burneth!'... Oh see what need we have of a day of Pentecost to begin in the hearts of ministers, that our words may be like fire, and the hearts of the people like wood!"

Mark Glanville is assistant pastor at Macquarie Chapel Presbyterian Church and a final-year student at the Presbyterian Theological Centre, Sydney. 

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Harsh lessons

**20 daily Bible studies
in Judges 17-21
& Mark 14:1-15:41**

The last five chapters of *Judges* are of a noticeably different character from the first 16. They serve as a kind of appendix – or rather, two appendices: 17-18, and 19-21. They give us a picture of what happens when God does not raise up a leader for His people, one who is moved by the Spirit of God, and everyone just does his own thing. The result is not very edifying, as we will see. In fact, it is quite sickening; and we find ourselves asking, “what place does this material have in God’s Holy Word?”

But these chapters do play an important part in God’s revelation. They show us how depraved man can become if God simply withdraws His restraining hand. Paul gives us a similar warning in *Romans 1:18-32*, and one which our own society would do well to heed. Moreover, they show us that the hand of God’s covenant mercy is also still present even in the darkest periods of the history of God’s people, His Church.

The history of our own church is not without its worrying and confusing times. We may look back and be embarrassed about some of the things our spiritual forebears did in the cause of Christ. But we see, too, the clear, unbroken thread of mercy even running through these events, just as we depend on that same mercy today.

In our journey through *Judges*, let us keep in mind that “there, but for the grace of God, go I”; then in our meditating on *Mark*, let us have a deeper appreciation of what our Saviour was going through for us.

Bruce Christian ▶

DAY 1

Patchwork religion

THE PASSAGE

JUDGES 17:1-13

THE POINT When God’s revealed truth isn’t honoured all sorts of things go wrong; and patchwork repair only introduces new problems.

THE PARTICULARS

- Micah’s crime might have gone unsolved had he not been afraid of the possible consequences of his mother’s curse; the blessing following his confession was intended to annul the curse (1-2).
- Micah and his mother showed little understanding of God’s ways when they assumed the breach of the 8th Commandment could be atoned for by making an idol (thus breaching the 2nd!). Many people try to appease God by trying to do “religi-

ous” things that are just as offensive and repugnant to Him as their sin itself (3-4).

- Micah’s mother’s gift of less than 20% of her promise (cf Acts 5:1f) only compounded the problem of religious practice based on human thinking rather than on God’s revealed Word (3-4).
- The state of God’s Church was not good: the lack of legitimate Levitical priests necessitating Micah’s use of his son (5); the attempted righting of this by appointing the Levite (10-12) only leading to a private instead of a public expression of worship.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are we guilty today of applying human wisdom to resolving the Church’s problems instead of trusting fully in God’s Word?

DAY 2

Laish... and laxish

THE PASSAGE

JUDGES 18:1-10

THE POINT The phrase “In those days Israel had no king” occurs 4 times in these 5 chapters (17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25), with the additional comment in the first and last: “everyone did as he saw fit”. This statement gives the framework in which we are to understand the recorded events. We are given a glimpse of what happens when we refuse to submit to God as the only King and follow the whims of our own imagination. We ought not be surprised by the actions of these desperate men, concerned only for their own welfare. This “law of the jungle” still rules in places today, as it does in every age, whenever God just leaves us to our own devices without restraint. Let us not put our hope in man’s innate goodness, but rather let us plead with

God for mercy.

THE PARTICULARS

- The tribe of Dan was among the last to occupy their inheritance in the Promised Land; Philistine oppression kept them moving.
- The Danites, few in number and still wandering in the south, recognised the Levite-priest and gained his favourable counsel for their intended attack on the isolated (and therefore largely unguarded) northern (Syrian) people east from Tyre and Sidon.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are we depending on God to guide and guard His Church today?

DAY 3

Priest or puppet?

THE PASSAGE

JUDGES 18:11-21

THE POINT Spurred on by the prospect of an easy and God-ordained victory up north, the relatively small (600 strong) Danite army set off; but they needed the added security of a lucky charm in the form of the priest and his religious trappings. The success of their mission might have been ordained by God, but the state of their spiritual life was far from healthy. They needed some physical assurances of God’s presence with them; they didn’t really know God as their covenant Lord and King. Israel had no King!

fact that Dan’s settlement was finally in the north (as in “from Dan to Beersheba” – 20:1) indicates the nomadic history of this tribe.

- The statement, “Now you know what to do” (14), betrays an accepted way of thinking in Israel far removed from what God had revealed to Moses in His laws. “We’ve got the numbers, we’ll do it our way regardless of the rights and needs of others.”
- The Levite priest, instead of being God’s man among the people and bringing them into His presence, had become a slave to icons and ritual, and the pressure and whims of the majority (18-21).

THE PARTICULARS

- The existence of “Camp of Dan” in the south (12) and the

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Is the Church guilty of following rather than leading society?

DAY 4

Sin and mercy

THE PASSAGE

JUDGES 18:22-31

THE POINT The difficulty we have with this first appendix in Judges now comes to a climax. The dislocated Danites are now settled in the place their sovereign Lord had allocated as their inheritance in the Promised Land, but what about the means by which this was achieved? What about all the moral, ethical and theological questions raised? There are no neat, heart-warming answers, and we are left with the reality that, in spite of man’s innately sinful heart and all the wickedness and human suffering flowing from it – even, and, sadly, sometimes especially, under the guise of religious ritual – God still fulfils His purpose for his Church. “A debtor to mercy alone, of covenant mercy I sing.” (Toplady)

THE PARTICULARS

- Micah had every right to ask his questions (24). But although there’s no excuse for the bullying tactics of the Danite army, we need to remember that Micah’s own life was far from consistent with God’s revealed word, and in the end any blessing we have from God we only enjoy while ever His mercy prevails (24-26).
- There is a textual emendation in the Hebrew text of verse 30 in an attempt to read Moses as Mannaseh, and thus clear the name of the great leader from association with these ungodly events.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What lessons must we learn from this part of Holy Scripture?

DAY 5

The lull before the storm

THE PASSAGE

JUDGES 19:1-8

THE POINT The events in the remaining 3 chapters of Judges are a salutary lesson for the Church of every age. What starts as a relatively minor domestic dispute soon snowballs into a national disgrace involving widespread bloodshed and gross immorality to a degree unthinkable among God's people. God was denied His rightful rule over His covenant people, His Church, Israel, so it is not surprising that chaos results. But God's mercy still persists.

THE PARTICULARS

- God's design for marriage, the faithful union between one man and one woman for life (Genesis 2:24, Exodus 20:14), cannot

be violated without a ripple effect of pain and suffering, and further sinful behaviour. The reported "unfaithfulness" of the Levite's concubine/wife was probably anger with him for some reason rather than adultery (for which she would have been stoned).

- Ancient eastern hospitality was much more relaxed and less rushed than anything modern western society is familiar with.
- The Levite was clearly repentant, but the woman's father was less inclined to accept the apology. The delay tactics indicate his unwillingness to do what he knew he really should do.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are we fully committed to upholding God's design for marriage?

DAY 6

Safety among the Lord's people?

THE PASSAGE

JUDGES 19:9-19

THE POINT In the course of our daily lives we are called on to make many small decisions, any one of which might have a greater effect on our destiny than we realise at the time. Thankfully, this doesn't happen often, and when it does it is comforting to know that we can rest in God's sovereign providence in the light of Romans 8:28. We will see tomorrow that at least two of the seemingly inconsequential decisions made by the concubine's husband in today's passage will lead to an outcome that affects the future of the whole nation, and that is why they are recorded here. We must never lose sight of the fact that God is in full control of His world and the outworking of its history (cf Genesis 50:20).

THE PARTICULARS

- The 1st decision with far-reaching consequences was the one to leave late in the afternoon rather than stay another night, thus making it impossible to reach their home before sunset (9-10).
- The 2nd was to press on to an Israelite town rather than stay among aliens on the (reasonable) assumption that this would be far safer. Yet, in spite of the obvious fact that they had plenty of provisions, the expected hospitality did not happen (11-19).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do you commit each day's plans and decisions to God in prayer?

DAY 7

A trust betrayed

THE PASSAGE

JUDGES 19:20-30

THE POINT Like the similar account of life in Sodom a millennium earlier (Genesis 19), the events recorded in this passage are difficult for us to comprehend or even believe, since we see the result of 2 millennia of restraining Christian influence on mankind. We can't even start to imagine people so degraded as the men of Gibeah – or the old man in offering up his defenceless virgin daughter as a rape victim, or the traveller his concubine whom, up to only a few hours before, he had spent almost a week trying to woo back because of his professed love for her!

THE PARTICULARS

- The traveller had taken the integrity of his Benjamite brothers

for granted; sadly, the old man had other local knowledge (20f).

- The behaviour of the Benjamites in the square in Gibeah was reprehensible. The depth of the moral degradation of every man in this story is beyond our imagination, and it remained a blot on Israel's moral landscape for generations to come (cf Hosea 9:9, 10:9). It again illustrates man without God's grace (22-26).
- The Levite's subsequent reaction to this atrocity seems callous and almost irrational; but it attempted to redress the injustice.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- In what ways is our society heading in this direction today?

DAY 8

Time to act

THE PASSAGE

JUDGES 20:1-11

THE POINT There is some hope to be seen in the unanimous outrage of the men of Israel when they heard about the atrocity in Gibeah. But we need to be careful that an expression of righteous indignation isn't an attempt to make oneself feel more holy by standing in judgement on the sin of another (cf Jesus' parable in Luke 18:9f).

THE PARTICULARS

- "Dan to Beersheba" is the whole land west of the Jordan from the northern to the southern extremity; Gilead is the region east of the Jordan. All the tribes were to be involved and united (1).
- Their assembly "before the LORD" at Mizpah is the first

sign we have had for some time that there is some genuine spiritual life!

- In the Levite's selective account of events there is no mention of his own part in handing over his concubine, nor in his having to almost trip over her to bring her death to his attention (4-7).
- What they were about to do was so significant that commitment ("none of us will go home" and "get provisions for the army") and solidarity needed to be evident; hence the steps taken to ensure a proportionate representation of all the tribes. Such a strong expression of unity among the tribes was rare in Israel (8-11).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Should the Church be more united in a stand against public sin?

DAY 9

Strange providence

THE PASSAGE

JUDGES 20:12-28

THE POINT It is easy to think that just because we are fighting for what is right we will always win; but often God has other lessons to teach us along the way before He finally vindicates our cause.

THE PARTICULARS

- The tribe of Benjamin was graciously given the opportunity to distance itself from the perpetrators of the atrocity in Gibeah; but instead they expressed their solidarity in the sin (12-16).
- The Benjamites were predominantly left-handed, but strangely, this did not seem to interfere at all with their dexterity (16)!
- On this occasion the tribes of Israel sought the LORD's

counsel in every aspect of their campaign, so convinced were they of the justice of their cause. For all their spiritual immaturity, at least they were clear about the wickedness in the LORD's eyes of the violation of the abused concubine's personhood (18, 23, 26-28).

- It seems that on the first two attempts the Israelites were really depending on their numbers and the justice of their cause and giving only lip-service to God. But after suffering two defeats they showed true repentance and really sought the LORD.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Have you experienced both discipline and mercy in God's providence in your life? How have you reacted to the discipline?

DAY 10

Society out of control

THE PASSAGE

JUDGES 20:29-48

THE POINT A vicious gang rape + a Levite priest driven by his emotions instead of the practice of godly wisdom + a failure of the local community to uphold justice = the loss of more than 40,000 lives.

THE PARTICULARS

- Having finally met with God with repentant hearts and gained His assurance, the Israelites could devote their wits and energy to a very strategic plan like the one used successfully by Joshua to defeat Ai (Joshua 8). Some unidentifiable place names and obscure Hebrew words make it hard to plot the exact course of events. It seems the main Israelite force attacked Gibeah from the NW. The Benjamites came out

against them expecting a 3rd walkover and encouraged in this deception by the (strategically) retreating Israelites. This was the signal for the smaller ambush party to come S and then W from their NE position and burn the temporarily defenceless city. The smoke was the sign for the retreating force to turn back suddenly on their pursuers who, seeing their city being destroyed and the other Israelite force coming from it, fled E and then N with only 600 finally escaping to Rock Rimmon.

- In the end the Benjamites' complacency was their downfall (32).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Is our society capable of this behaviour, but for God's grace?

DAY 11

Why has this happened to Israel?

THE PASSAGE

JUDGES 21:1-12

THE POINT Sometimes we sit and reflect on the past history of the Church and we can only weep as we ask, "Why has this happened to God's people?". The answer is not usually hard to find. There might have been a period of unfaithfulness or apostasy for which God brings judgement – as in the case of Israel's 40 years in the desert or their 70 years in Babylon. Or it might have been the result of over-zealous discipline, as in our present case. Last month we saw the predicament Jephthah got himself into by making a rash promise to God that he was therefore bound to keep (11:29-35). The zeal of the Israelites in slaughtering all the Benjamites except for 600 men, and then making a vow not to let them marry any of their

own women, effectively wiped out a whole tribe for ever. And there's something about the number "11" that doesn't sound quite right. Something had to be done.

THE PARTICULARS

- The solution to the dilemma caused by one rash vow was found by enforcing another vow. The Gileadites belonged to the tribe of Manasseh, Rachel's grandson and therefore close relatives of Benjamin. Their failure to muster provided a pretext (legitimated by another vow) for killing all except potential brides!

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What happens when human "wisdom" rejects God's Word?

DAY 12

Still 200 short!

THE PASSAGE

JUDGES 21:13-25

THE POINT The previous piece of sophistry only solved two-thirds of the problem; now we need another one. The vow might prevent the people of Shiloh giving their daughters to the Benjamites, but it said nothing about the Benjamites helping themselves on a suitable festive occasion. After all, a bit of "flirting" is what we expect under these circumstances! "Go on guys, help us out of this bind – be good sports." It's hard to read these chapters without being nauseated by the depth of immorality God's people had reached because they had no king, and "everyone did as he saw fit" (25). It is a stark reminder of where our own society is headed if we don't acknowledge Christ's rightful rule in His world. It also helps

us to understand why Jesus came as the true King of Israel, the one through whom all things would be renewed; and why He had to suffer in that role to bear the punishment for human depravity. "There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin; He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in."

THE PARTICULARS

- There is little thought given to the feelings of the girls in all this. Christ's coming has done much to restore the dignity of women.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are we guilty of this same sophistry by spiritualising ungodly means to achieve worthy aims in the work of God's kingdom?

DAY 13

Anointing the rejected King

THE PASSAGE

MARK 14:1-11

THE POINT In the midst of the final attacks on Jesus – by His enemies who opposed Him and His “friend” who betrayed Him – a beautiful thing happens: a woman anoints Him with very expensive oil, which would have been a great sacrifice for her. Jesus, by His life and teaching, encourages us to be concerned about the poor around us, but there is a context where the only thing of genuine importance is bowing humbly at His feet as King (cf Luke 10:38-42).

THE PARTICULARS

• Although it was mainly the hypocrisy of the Pharisees that was the object of Jesus’ criticism, in the end it was the chief priests and the teachers of the law who were most opposed to Him (1).

- It is significant that Jesus’ enemies were reluctant to make their move at Passover time, but God’s Plan was fulfilled exactly by the timely interference of Judas to precipitate it (2, 10-11)!
- The anointing of Jesus by the woman at Bethany was not the only time this had happened (cf Luke 7:36-50). Jesus interpreted this one specifically as acknowledging His Messiahship (6-9).
- John tells us that it was Mary who anointed Jesus, and the main objector among the disciples was Judas (4-5, cf Jn 12:1-8).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do your good deeds sometimes interfere with your devotion?

DAY 14

My blood of the covenant

THE PASSAGE

MARK 14:12-26

THE POINT Mark’s Lord’s Supper account is powerful in its simplicity.

THE PARTICULARS

- Mark shows the important link between what Jesus was about to do and the Passover, especially the killing of the lamb whose life-blood was sacrificed/substituted to protect the life-blood of God’s people in Egypt (12, cf Exodus 12).
- This Passover meal was not just the last supper Jesus would share with His disciples before His death, it would be the Lord’s Supper that He would institute as a sacramental means of grace for His followers to observe regularly throughout the whole Gospel Age until He finally returned to claim His

Kingdom. The preparation for it therefore had to be planned in detail (13-16), just as the first Passover had to be planned in detail (Exod. 12).

- All through the account of what God did to show the depth of His love we are reminded of Judas’ terrible act of betrayal (17-21). (The last few chapters of Judges helped prepare us for this!)
- God’s perfect plan was fulfilled; but Judas was still guilty (21).
- The consumption of the broken bread and poured out wine in the context of a meal signifies our oneness with/in Christ (22-26).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Reflect on what Jesus was prepared to do/endure to save you.

DAY 15

If it be possible... nevertheless...

THE PASSAGE

MARK 14:27-42

THE POINT There are tensions in the Bible that defy logic, but we can still relate to them in our life experiences. Judas’ culpability for doing what he was predestined to do (21) is one: nearly 50 years ago I made a voluntary decision to follow Jesus, only to find out later that my name has always been in His Book, Rev. 17:8! Another is the fact that Jesus knew from all eternity what was involved in His earthly mission, referring to it constantly in His public ministry, yet now in the garden He struggles desperately with a decision to go through with it: our wrestling in prayer with steadfast faith is always in the context of a heart that submits to God’s sovereign will. We live by faith and not by sight.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus’ application of Zech. 13:7 to the events in Gethsemane (27) should encourage us to read the whole OT as His book, keeping Him in mind as we see God’s history unfolding (cf Luke 24:27).
- We always think of Peter’s protestation of loyalty to death, but Mark and Matthew tell us that they were all involved (29-31).
- Jesus’ struggle with bearing the burden of our sin is in the midst of the disciples’ display of human confusion and weakness.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What would have been weighing heaviest on Jesus’ heart?

DAY 16

Jesus and Judas

THE PASSAGE

MARK 14:43-59

THE POINT From our later revealed perspective it is clear that what is happening in the betrayal, arrest and trial of Jesus is a spiritual conflict of cosmic proportions. Knowing this we see just how out of touch Judas, the Jewish leaders, and even the disciples (Peter included) are with spiritual realities. They are all confused, fighting the wrong battles; only Jesus is in full control!

THE PARTICULARS

- Judas, one of Jesus’ close disciples, the betrayer, arrives right on cue to play out his part: man using man’s wit and weaponry, both quite useless for the spiritual battle that is raging. Sadly,

the kiss wasn’t even necessary and so only served to intensify the depravity of Judas’ course of action in others’ eyes (43-46).

- The other disciples also resorted to physical means of defence; in spiritual warfare these are unnecessary and useless (47-50). Only Dr Luke tells us Jesus healed the ear (22:51). The young man who fled naked was probably Mark himself (51-52).
- The whole arrest/trial was a sham: an unauthorised lynching at night; false witnesses; deliberate distortion of facts (53-59).
- For all his weakness in denying Jesus, at least Peter was there!

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What would have hit Judas hardest when he realised his sin?

DAY 17

Jesus and Peter

THE PASSAGE

MARK 14:60-72

THE POINT Jesus and Peter were each being cross-examined. Jesus' interrogators were a group of powerful, hostile, declared enemies who wanted His blood; Peter's were a servant girl and some unknown bystanders. Jesus knew that a cruel death awaited Him; Peter thought he may be implicated although he knew it was his Lord they were after. Jesus testified to the truth, regardless of the consequences; Peter lied to save his neck, and this in spite of his firm declaration of loyalty only a few hours earlier. Jesus came to show what authentic manhood looks like; Peter exemplifies our human weakness, our concern for self rather than God.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus remained silent when the accusations were false, a deliberate distortion of the facts to achieve a desired end. In this context, anything He said would be dealt with in the same way (60).
- Jesus' reply to the specific question about His true identity as God's promised Messiah began with "I am", which they rightly saw as a claim to be God Himself (see Exodus 3:14) (61-62).
- The consequences of the Jewish leaders' response if Jesus really was their God are awful. They were taking a big risk (65)!

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- When was the last time you did a "Peter" on Jesus?

DAY 18

Jerusalem and Rome

THE PASSAGE

MARK 15:1-15

THE POINT Mark draws a clear contrast between a group on the one hand who had an agenda of hate against Jesus but with no power to do much about it, and a man on the other who seemed to have nothing but admiration for Jesus but who was in a position to have Him executed. That emotions and politics carried the day rather than truth and justice is a sad commentary on our fallen world, but then, it was because of this situation that Jesus came to die. And God upholds justice through suffering and sacrifice.

THE PARTICULARS

- The Jewish leaders' firm objective was to have Jesus crucified publicly as a criminal. This was the only way they could hope

to minimise any backlash from the common people. Pilate was astute in his assessment that they were driven by envy (10), but driven they were; at all costs they had to get Pilate on side (1).

- Pilate was caught between a rock and a hard place: getting the Jewish hierarchy offside in such a volatile outpost as Jerusalem would be political suicide – but Jesus was so clearly innocent!
- The Barabbas idea seemed an excellent solution, but the accusers weren't going to let Pilate off the hook. (It is interesting that Barabbas means "father's son", ie "anyone" – you and I go free!)

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- To what extent does your faith challenge other allegiances?

DAY 19

Bearing shame and scoffing rude...

THE PASSAGE

MARK 15:16-32

THE POINT Jesus is God's appointed and anointed King. One day, every knee without exception will bow before Him and acknowledge this truth, no matter how reluctantly (Philippians 2:9-11). Jesus has proved Himself beyond question to be a humble, kind, wise, just, loving, caring King. This is what makes the events reported in today's passage so sad. It is one thing to be mocked for some personality quirk that is a bit eccentric; it is quite another thing to have your "core business" mocked by people who are blind to the truth. But Jesus accepted all this. This, by its nature, was the basic expression of the sin for which He had come to die!

THE PARTICULARS

- The soldiers pushed the Emperor King motif to the limit in their mockery: the purple robe; the cruel, painful "crown" of thorns; the feigned acts of homage. The Jewish leaders mocked Him as Messiah King: "He was supposed to be coming to save us as a nation but can't even save Himself – what kind of king is that?"
- I really struggle with the idea of men spitting on my Saviour; but He accepted this to deal with my sin – so offensive to a holy God.
- Jesus truly identified Himself with our wicked world (25-32).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What insults are you prepared to suffer for following Christ?

DAY 20

...in my place condemned He stood

THE PASSAGE

MARK 15:33-41

THE POINT With his succinct style Mark sums up the whole purpose and effect of Jesus' death in just a few sentences: its cosmic context; its connection with the OT Scriptures; its fulfilling and superseding of the sacrificial system; its impact that drove at least one of the soldiers to the inescapable conclusion, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" The Cross is the heart of our message.

THE PARTICULARS

- The 3 hours of darkness from midday in April (approaching summer) is not a natural phenomenon; God was saying something to His world about the scope of what was happening (33).

- Jesus quoted the opening of Psalm 22 not just to express how He felt as He bore the guilt for our sin, but to point us to the whole psalm as a millennium-old prophecy concerning His death (34).

- The witnesses are in no doubt that Jesus has really died (37).
- The tearing of the curtain (representing the gulf between sinful man and his holy God and requiring the elaborate ritual of animal sacrifice for only the high priest to pass through) from top to bottom, signifies that God Himself has now opened up that access for all the people all the time (38, see Hebrews 10:19-22).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do you really know what it means that Jesus died for you?



Across Australia

Cross-cultural ministry

By 2015, it is estimated, 49 per cent of the population of Sydney will not be Anglo-Celtic. Already many suburbs have high concentrations of people from a non-English-speaking background, many of whom are very open to the gospel. To this end the **Ministry and Mission Committee (PCNSW)** has created a new position – **cross-cultural ministry coordinator**. **Rev. Mike Wilson** has been appointed to the role after seven years as a missionary in Pakistan and 12 years providing consultancy and training for cross-cultural ministry in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.

His task is to define and begin strategies in three areas: to reach increasing numbers of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds with the gospel; to help and equip existing non-English-speaking Presbyterian churches; and to train congregations in ministry to such people. Mike can be contacted on (02) 9690 9348 or mobile 0425 239 801.

Vanuatu appointment

Rev. Dr. Andy Williamson, his wife **Rosemary** and their two girls are returning to Vanuatu this year where Andy will lecture in Bible and theology full-time at **Talua**. The churches of Vanuatu have invited them to produce a study Bible to help them understand the teaching of Scripture more comprehensively.

Fremantle teachers

On 12 March the session of **Scots Church, Fremantle** commissioned three Sunday School teachers – **Mr Ian Small**, **Mrs Neva Macrae** and **Mrs Sharon Bonnington** during the morning worship service. The event was especially significant as Ian Small was himself at one stage a member of the Scots Sunday School. The growth in the Sunday School and attendance of children at church has been particularly notable in the last year.

Sudanese student

The Presbyterian Theological College in Melbourne is looking forward to the arrival of **Rev. Tut Mai Ngouth** and fam-

ily from Sudan. Tut is being sponsored by the **PWMU** to come and study at the college.

From Kyrgystan with love

On 14 November 40 people gathered at **Scots Church, Maitland (NSW)** for lunch and to meet and hear **Myles and Robyn Parker**, missionaries on furlough from **Kyrgystan**. The meeting was organised by **Presbyterians as Mission Supporters**. The Parkers returned to Kyrgystan in January.

New missionaries

The **Mission Partners APWM National Committee** has approved **Calvin and Ruth Mathys** from the **Warburton (Vic)** congregation and **Laszlo and Eva Mihalyi** from the **Donvale (Vic)** congregation as new Partner Society missionaries. Calvin and Ruth are hoping to serve in Papua New Guinea later in 2006. Calvin is an aeronautical engineer and Ruth has skills in linguistics. Laszlo and Eva, and their son Robert 13, are planning to serve in Hungary in August 2006 to assist in church planting and renewal with **Pioneers**.

Code updated

The new edition of the **GAA Constitution, Procedure and Practice** (The GAA “code”) has recently been published by the **GAA Code Committee**. It includes all amendments since the 1993 edition. It is available through the **PCNSW Church Office** (02) 9690 9333.

Missionary prayers

The **Australian Presbyterian World Mission** in Victoria will hold missionary

prayer meetings during 2006 on the fifth Saturday of the following months from 10am to 12noon followed by a **BYO** lunch together. The first will be held at **Clayton** (29 April), then **Sunshine** (29 July) and **Heidelberg** (30 September). The purpose of these meetings is to bring praying people together to pray!

Perona fills Gap

Rev. Chris Perona was inducted into **The Gap** congregation (Qld) on 10 February. Chris, his wife **Michele**, and their four children, **Josiah, Margaret, Timothy** and **Trinity**, were warmly welcomed into the congregation at a special evening supper held after the induction service. Chris has spent the last five years ministering to the **Rochester (Vic.)** congregation.

Appointments

On 19 February the **Presbytery of Sydney** met at **Chinese Presbyterian Church** to license **Mr Stephen Fong** as a preacher of the Gospel. Stephen is in his exit appointment as the minister at **Cherrybrook**.

The **Presbytery of Flinders** conducted a service of induction of **Rev. Colin Barwise** into the parish of **Aspendale-Seaford** on Friday 24 March.

New market chief

Following the retirement of **Mrs Anne Ball** as convener of the **PWA NSW Presbyterian Market Committee**, the 2005 AGM appointed **Mrs Sue Rumble** to this position. A cheque for \$45,000 (proceeds of the 2005 market) was recently presented to **Presbyterian Social Services** to buy specialised equipment to enable the staff at **Allowah Presbyterian Children’s Hospital** to provide quality

The Annual Edersheim Lecture

“Tensions between Jews and Gentiles within Empire and Church in the 1st Century AD”

Speaker: Rev Dr Paul Barnett, Moore College, Sydney
Sydney Venue: Ashfield Presbyterian Church, Cnr Liverpool Rd & Knox St, Ashfield
Time: 7.30pm, Thursday 11th May
Melbourne Venue: South Yarra Presbyterian Church, 621 Punt Road, South Yarra
Time: 7.30pm, Wednesday 17th May

CWU
 www.cwu.org.au

Alfred Edersheim is a well-known 19th century Jewish, Christian scholar from Vienna who ministered in the UK and Romania. He authored The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, and other classics. Following in his footsteps, the concern of this annual lecture is to examine themes relating to the Jewish people and the Christian faith. From this lecture we hope to learn lessons for today from problems of the past.

For further information contact Paul Morris
 paulmorris@ozemail.com.au; (02) 9597 2004 / 0431 940257

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Christian Witness to Israel

care to the special children at the hospital. This year's market project is to contribute toward the completion of the **PCNSW Christian Education Committee's PREP** which is a Bible teaching resource for children aged five to 12 for SRE, Sunday School and other situations. The 2006 market will be held on Wednesday 23 August at Willoughby Civic Centre in Sydney.



Around the World

State trains jihadists

The Nigerian government says its intelligence agents have found that **Kano** state in northern Nigeria is seeking foreign support to train 100 jihadists among vigilante enforcers of Islamic law called **Hisbah**. The state sought to train the militants in "intelligence" and the "practice of jihad" with the help of foreign Islamic governments, said **Nigerian Information and National Orientation Minister Frank Nweke Jr.** Christians in sharia states have complained of assault, harassment, intimidation, and flagrant violation of the religious rights of Christians by the Hisbah, which one leader said is a "terror machine" in the hands of fanatical Islamic governments aimed at strangling Christianity in northern Nigeria.

Compass

Nigerian Christians react

Nigerian Anglican Archbishop **Peter Akinola**, president of the **Christian Association of Nigeria**, has said Muslims have misunderstood sacrifices of Nigerian Christians for peace as weakness. "We have watched helplessly the killing, maim-

ing and destruction of Christians and their property by Muslim fanatics and fundamentalists at the slightest or no provocation at all," he said. "It is no longer a hidden fact that a long-standing agenda to make this Nigeria an Islamic nation is being surreptitiously pursued."

Meanwhile, Christian rioters have killed Muslims and torched mosques in the southern Nigerian city of **Onitsha** in retaliation for anti-Christian violence that killed dozens in the north, witnesses said. A Christian trader said young men armed with guns, stones and machetes tore through the market, attacking any Muslim in sight, and as he fled the violence he saw many dead bodies.

The Red Cross said several mosques were torched and rioters made bonfires in the streets.

Sisters triumph

Two young Coptic Christian women whose father had converted to Islam when they were infants have won a court battle in Egypt to retain their official religious identity as Christians. Now 18 and 19 years old, **Iman** and **Olfat Malak Ayet** will be issued national identity cards matching their Christian birth certificates. In the final verdict, presiding **Judge Farouk Ali Abdel Kader** of Cairo's District No. 1 Administrative Court declared that the civil authorities had conducted a "non-justified intervention" by imposing upon the two plaintiffs a belief they had not chosen.

Meanwhile, a young Christian woman abducted by Muslims and missing for more than a month has telephoned her relatives and reported being imprisoned in a Cairo apartment while facing pressure to convert to Islam. Last seen in the village of **El-Saff** 30 miles south of Cairo on January 3, **Theresa Ghattass Kamal** briefly contacted her aunt on January 24. Her phone call contradicted earlier police statements

that she had converted to Islam voluntarily and did not want to see her family again. The call was traced to an apartment of known Muslim fundamentalists.

Compass

Christian conscripts jailed

Eritrean military authorities have jailed 75 Protestant Christians at the Sawa Military Training Camp for "reading Bibles and praying during their free time", local sources in the small East African nation confirmed. Most of the newly arrested evangelicals, 37 of them women, are student youths doing their compulsory national military service at Sawa, a remote centre near Eritrea's mountainous western border with Sudan. They had not broken any military law.

Compass

Christianity a "threat"

Christianity is a major threat to Indian nationalism, according to organisers of a "reconversion" rally in Gujarat in February. They led the 60,000-strong crowd to repeat "I will save my religion," and the throng often shouted, "*Jai Shri Ram* (Praise be to the god Rama)." The assembly resolved to save the Hindu religion and **Bharat Mata** (Mother India goddess) by reconverting Christians. **Sadhvi Ritambhara**, a popular Hindu preacher whose programs are aired on several TV channels, said, "They [Christians] call us harvest. They intend to pluck us out. And foreigners want to do this to us." **Ritambhara** said it was imperative for Hindus to take up arms to save their religion.

Henry Morris dies

Henry Morris, founder of the **Institute for Creation Research**, died on 25 February, aged 87. Dr Morris served on

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the faculties of three major universities and also founded the **Christian Heritage College** (now **San Diego Christian College**). Dr Morris was considered the father of the modern Creation movement. A prolific Christian writer, he is best known for *The Bible and Modern Science*, *The Genesis Record*, *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science*, *The Long War Against God* and *The Defender's Bible*.

Church burnings in America

A press conference sponsored by the **National Coalition for Burned Churches**, in partnership with the **Centre for Democratic Renewal**, in Atlanta, Georgia, in February issued a plea to the public to help burned churches rebuild and to law enforcement to adopt new measures for responding to fires and helping prevent them. Church burnings have not stopped over the past 15 years. From 1999 to 2000, some 1507 church fires were determined to be caused by arson, attempted arson, suspicious, or undetermined, said **Rose Johnson-Mackey**, the coalition's program director. Five Baptist churches in Alabama which were in the same vicinity were burned on 3 February.

Yemeni murderer executed

Yemeni government officials have executed a second Yemeni gunman for killing three Southern Baptist medical missionaries in 2002. **Abed Abdul Razak Kamel** was convicted for the December 2002 shooting deaths of three **Jibla Baptist Hospital** staff, hospital director **William Koehn**, doctor **Martha Myers** and purchasing agent **Kathleen Gariety**. Yemeni officials believe Kamel and another gunman (**Ali al-Jarallah** was executed in December 2005) had ties to the **al-Qaeda** terrorist network. The hospital reopened in 2003 and continues its ministry under the name "Peace Hospital". The facility provides care for thousands of people in Yemen.

Catholics criticise corruption

Indonesia's Catholic bishops have launched a strong appeal for a personal commitment against corruption in their Lenten pastoral letter. **Fr Aloys Budi Purnomo**, a diocesan priest of Semarang Archdiocese in Central Java, said the problem must be seen in the current scenario, where corruption, nepotism and collusion are rife in social life. Even the Supreme Court has not been spared,

"with **Probosutedjo**, an important businessman and cousin of former president **Soeharto**, having to fork out at least 16 billion rupiah [AU\$2.34 million] to persuade some judges to 'forget' his corruption charges". The **Cardinal of Jakarta, Julius Darmaatmadja**, said corruption is a symptom of dishonesty.

Asia News

Blind eye to gay unions

The **Church of Scotland's General Assembly** is to be asked to allow ministers and deacons to conduct church services marking civil partnerships free from fear of punishment. A new report says the assembly will be asked to agree that "a sympathetic minister" carrying out some form of religious ceremony for same sex couples does not constitute a disciplinary offence. However, the report into the implications of such partnerships being fully recognised in law also includes a request to the General Assembly to agree that no minister or deacon will be obliged to conduct such a service "against his or her conscience". The legal questions committee, acknowledging the controversial nature of the issue, has shied away from including the word "blessing" in the document, which is described as "permissive in tone but will protect conscience on all sides".

Indian missionary to Wales

Indian tribes once converted to Christianity by missionaries from Wales are returning to evangelise the Welsh because of their belief that the country is in a state of religious decline. The **Diocese of Mizoram**, in the north-east of India, has sent one missionary to south Wales and is planning to send another this month, to help the Welsh Presbyterian Church with its shortage of ministers. Many of the Mizos, as they call themselves, were converted to Christianity by the Welsh between 1840 and 1960, with more than 80 per cent of the population becoming Christian. Mizos refer to the Presbyterian Church of Wales as the "Mother Church", and the ties are very strong.

Presbyterian Church of Wales Office

Christians sue police

A Christian couple at the centre of a free speech row are suing their local council and police for breaching their human rights. In December, retired couple **Joe**

and **Helen Roberts** of Lancashire, were interrogated by police officers because the couple had complained about their local council's gay rights policy. The couple politely expressed their Christian belief that homosexual practice is morally wrong.

An official at **Wyre Borough Council** reported the couple to the police for making "homophobic" comments. The council said they wanted the police to "educate" the couple out of their beliefs. Two police officers knocked on the door of 73-year-old Joe and 68-year-old Helen, saying they wished to discuss problems caused by local youths. Once inside the house, the police revealed their real reason for the visit and proceeded to quiz the couple for an hour and 20 minutes about their beliefs on homosexuality. Mr and Mrs Roberts say the officers told them they risked going to prison for up to seven years. The police have since confirmed that no crime was committed.

The legal action claims that the actions of Wyre Borough Council and **Lancashire Constabulary** interfered with the couple's rights to freedom of expression and freedom of religion under the Human Rights Act. It also claims that the council and the police were negligent, and that the police entered the Roberts' home by means of a trick and were therefore trespassers.

The **Christian Institute** is supporting the legal action. **Director Colin Hart** said today: "It is outrageous that the police should tell an elderly Christian couple that they cannot express their moral views to their local council. It is astonishing that the council reported the matter to the police in the first place. I regret that neither the police nor the council have admitted they were wrong. They have refused to say sorry for what they did. We are supporting the Roberts case. It is an important case for freedom of speech and freedom of religion."

Any damages awarded to the Roberts will be donated to charity.

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On the Agenda

Hate law challenged

By Barney Zwartz

A call by Victorian church leaders to change the state's religious hatred laws has met a cool response from the Premier's Department.

"It was a robust discussion," said **Rev. David Palmer**, the organiser of a letter by the leaders to the Premier.

Mr Palmer, convener of the **Church and Nation Committee** (ethics committee) of the **Presbyterian Church of Victoria**, said he rang the Premier's Department to seek a meeting with **Premier Steve Bracks**. The official would not make an appointment, but said there would be a discussion in the department and she would get back to him, Mr Palmer said.

Leaders from most of the state's main churches wrote to Mr Bracks recently, saying the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act was causing more enmity than harmony.

Christians have been concerned at a number of cases brought under the act, particularly a complaint by the **Islamic Council of Victoria** against Pentecostal group **Catch the Fire** and two pastors. The complaint was upheld, and an appeal will be heard later this year.

Mr Palmer said he told the official that the leaders were speaking for the great bulk of the Christian church.

"I said trivial amendments will not do. There needs to be substantial reworking of the legislation, including removal of the civil provisions and providing protection for freedom of religion," he said.

The letter was signed by **Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian** and

Assembly of God leaders, several Orthodox churches, and Melbourne's biggest churches, including **CityLife, Crossway** and **Careforce**.

Mr Palmer said the **Uniting, Baptist** and **Churches of Christ** denominations were not invited to sign because in the regular heads of churches meetings their leaders had been in favour of the existing legislation.

"Instead, we went for the biggest Church of Christ, Careforce, and the biggest Baptist church, Crossway," he said.

Last year, Mr Bracks suggested the legislation needed only minor amendments. The president of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, Stuart Morris, threw out one complaint as "preposterous" and recommended changes to the act in his finding, including the need to prevent vexatious cases.

Mr Palmer said the churches' recommended amendments, drawn up by constitutional lawyers, were based on Justice Morris's remarks and on proposed British legislation under which the police investigate any complaints and the public prosecutor decides whether to bring charges.

A spokeswoman for the Premier said at the time that he had yet to receive the letter, but a meeting of heads of churches the previous week had generally supported the direction of his proposed amendments. If there were ongoing matters to be raised there would be opportunities as part of the process, she said.

The Age

Converts face death

By Jody Brown and Allie Martin

Abdul Rahman, the Afghan man who faced a possible death penalty for converting to Christianity, has been released from a Kabul prison. No one, however, seems to know where he is. Because of death threats from radical Muslim clerics, he wants to seek asylum in another country.

The United Nations says it will work with Afghanistan to accommodate Rahman's request for asylum. Rahman, who claims he converted from the Muslim faith 16 years ago, recently faced the death penalty for that decision until a Kabul court dismissed the charges and reportedly released him from a high-security prison late last month.

The president of a grassroots human-rights organisation says while much attention has been focused on Rahman, his case is not an isolated incident. A recent report from Associated Press confirms that observation.

Jim Jacobsen, president of Christian Freedom International, says there are "literally thousands" of Christians all over the Islamic world who are awaiting a death sentence because they converted to Christianity.

"We're involved with many, many other cases just like [Rahman's]," Jacobsen says. "They lose everything - all possessions, their inheritance. They're literally thrown out into the streets. The local mosque will issue a fatwa or death sentence against them."

AP points out that Afghanistan is not the only US ally where Muslim converts to Christianity can face prosecution or even execution. Saudi Arabia, for example, neither permits conversion from Islam nor allows other religions in the kingdom. In addition, there are no churches, and missionaries are barred. Islamic Shariah law considers conversion to any other religion apostasy and most Muslim scholars agree the punishment is death.

Agape Press

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Da Vinci: Be prepared

A resource guide for decoding the controversial book.

‘Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false.’ So claims Sir Leigh Teabing, one of the central characters in *The Da Vinci Code*. Copyright disputes allowing, the film of Dan Brown’s best-selling book will be released in Australia on 18 May. Produced by Ron Howard and starring Tom Hanks as Robert Langdon, it promises to be a gigantic blockbuster.

The release of the film will raise the book’s claims once again. For it is far more than simply another Hollywood commercial bonanza, it has become a genuine cultural phenomenon. When you pick up *The Da Vinci Code*, you join millions of readers world-wide. While the book is similar to other thrillers you can find in airport bookshops across the globe, it contains a powerful, seemingly believable anti-Christian message. In doing so, *The Da Vinci Code* gives Christians a fantastic opportunity to respond to its falsehoods with the truth of the Gospel.

The Da Vinci Code is set at a cracking pace and will no doubt translate into a very entertaining movie. Brian H. Edwards (*Da Vinci: A Broken Code*) summarises the storyline thus: “On one side of the conspiracy is the Priory of Sion, a secret society dating back to the time of the Knights Templar in the Crusades of the Middle Ages, whose mission is to preserve, at all costs, the true secret of the Holy Grail. When this secret is revealed to the world, which the Priory of Sion is pledged to do at some time, it will correct the false story about Jesus that Christians have been conned into believing over the past 1700 years, and at the same time utterly discredit the Christian Church.

On the other side of the conspiracy are agents of Opus Dei, a Catholic society determined to find the Grail and destroy it. Knowing full well the devastating effects should its contents become universally known, they will stop at nothing to eliminate all who stand in their way. Caught in-between the Priory of Sion and Opus Dei are Robert Langdon, a Harvard professor of iconography and religious art, Sophie Neveu, an agent from the Department of Cryptology of the French



**Stuart
Bonnington**

Judicial Police, and an eccentric British historian, Sir Leigh Teabing. The battle is to possess the Keystone which, when its code is broken, will reveal the location of the Holy Grail.”

The essential spiritual message of *The Da Vinci Code* is concentrated in three short chapters (55-56, 58, p.311-336 in the Corgi edition), although other heretical themes are present all the way through



The Da Vinci Code does present a great opportunity to set forth the true gospel message.

Brown’s story. In *The Da Vinci Code* we learn among other things (so Brown claims) that the Bible is a merely human book, which awaits a definite version; there are many other legitimate “gospels” in addition to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; the emperor Constantine completely corrupted “Christianity” for his own political ends and purposes; Jesus became divine only as a result of “a relatively close vote” at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD; the truth about Jesus has been suppressed ever since by the Vatican but despite the Roman Church’s best efforts, the Dead Sea Scrolls have brought a “right view” of Jesus to the modern world; the Holy Grail is a person – Mary Magdalene, who was married to Jesus Christ and bore him an earthly bloodline that persists up to present times.

Brown also asserts that “sacred” sex is a way to a relationship with “God” and that Leonardo Da Vinci communicated the idea that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene in his famous picture of the Last Supper. Christians who are dismissive of the whole fuss surrounding *The Da Vinci Code* (and who can blame them?) need to remember that multitudes of non-Christians in our society have not only read it, but accept absolutely that what Brown says in it is completely true. Asking around circles of family and friends often reveals this.

As suggested above, despite the Christian’s grave misgivings, *The Da Vinci Code* does present a great opportunity to set forth the true gospel message. And thankfully we have been given a great range of resources to help us do this. There are a growing number of books, of which those introduced below are but a brief sample. This list does not pretend to contain a full listing of all the worthwhile books published as Christian responses to *The Da Vinci Code* but attempts to be a modest representative sampling of what is currently available in print.

To give away in truck loads to as many people as possible

Da Vinci: A Broken Code
Brian H Edwards (Day One, 2005)

This is an excellent, large-format booklet which could be given to anyone who has read *The Da Vinci Code* or expresses an interest in it. In 32 pages, Edwards covers the central message (but who is the Randall mentioned in page 3?), the question of the Gnostic gospels, Mary Magdalene and Jesus, the question of the accuracy or otherwise of the “facts” of the book, the place of Leonardo Da Vinci in the book, the origins of Dan Brown’s ideas and his agenda in putting the book out. On this last point Edwards says that Brown has three aims: promoting the sacred feminine, presenting sex as a sacrament and denying that Jesus is God. The booklet ends with a brief but pointed evangelistic challenge. All this for \$2.95 a copy, which is unbeatable value.

The Da Vinci Code: A Response
Nicky Gumble
(Alpha International, 2005)

Like Edwards’ booklet, *The Da Vinci Code: A Response* is a beautifully pro-

Responding to The Da Vinci Code

Here are some suggestions on using the current interest in *The Da Vinci Code* as a springboard for evangelism.

1. Put an ad in your local paper and offer people free copies of either *The Da Vinci Code: A Response* or *The Da Vinci Code: A Broken Code* as a public service to the community by your church.
2. Conduct a community spiritual

survey in your local mall or as part of your regular door to door visitation programme. Include some questions on the DVC.

3. Donate as many copies as possible of high quality evangelical books responding to the DVC to your public library system and local high school libraries. Don't forget to put your church contact details somewhere.

duced, simple but very concise overview of the main points, joined with a strong Christian response to its claims. While it covers basically the same territory as Edwards and comes to very similar conclusions, it marshalls different evidence and support to reject *The Da Vinci Code*. It ends with a rather understated but nevertheless powerful call to faith in the real Jesus. This booklet is also inexpensive enough to be given away in substantial quantities.

To read so you can deal intelligently with the issues

Breaking The Da Vinci Code
Darrell L. Bock (Nelson, 2004)

Full marks to Dr Darrell Bock for this masterful survey of the issues raised by *The Da Vinci Code*. Dr Bock, of Dallas Theological Seminary in Texas, organises his book around seven key questions which probably summarise the initial questions

most people would have about *The Da Vinci Code*. That being said, it is surprising that the question of the divinity of Jesus was not one of them, although Bock goes on to make helpful comments about this central NT assertion at the end of his book. *Breaking The Da Vinci Code* also has a web site – www.thomasnelson.com/breakingthedavincicode – and, like Green's book, has a short but very helpful glossary of words and personalities found in *The Da Vinci Code* and its refutations. Bock's book, while not cast in as popular a mould as Jones and Garlow or as applied to the modern church scene as Green, will nevertheless appeal to the type of reader who wants to know something of the facts behind the rejection of *The Da Vinci Code*.

The Books the Church Suppressed
Michael Green (Monarch, 2005)

Michael Green's books have always combined scholarly depth with helpful

contemporary application and relevance. *The Books the Church Suppressed* is up there with the best of his many volumes. It approaches the challenge *The Da Vinci Code* mounts to Christianity in a different way, as Green has written a brief but comprehensive introduction to the whole question of the Canon of Scripture, then discusses the Gnostics, their "gospels" and beliefs and why the Church eventually rejected them.

In masterful style, Green ties *The Da Vinci Code* in with the more general revival of gnosticism seen in existing liberal denominations like the Episcopal Church of the United States, and highlights the deadly threat this to true faith, genuine spirituality and Christian witness. The chart comparing modern Gnosticism and Orthodox Christianity (on pp 159-161 by Green's friend Filmore Strunk) alone is almost worth the cost of the book.

Cracking The Da Vinci Code
James L. Garlow and Peter Jones
(Victor, 2004)

Dr Peter Jones teams up with Dr James Garlow to produce a very easy-to-read review and answer of the central themes of *The Da Vinci Code*. Of all the books I've read on *The Da Vinci Code*, this is by far the most winsome in terms of potential appeal to the general and non-Christian reader. It packs real theological punch but does so in a very interesting way. This takes place from the opening page where the quote from Leonardo Da Vinci which forms a central part of Dan Brown's book is given a very different slant, it continues with the easy to read large print, the side bars, the (Van Tillian) "circles" at the start of each chapter, Carrie's story, the full-colour reproduction of The Last Supper, the reverse printing of key quotes, the study guide bound in with the book and (of course) the companion web site! The great frustration is the page references to *The Da Vinci Code* are to the US edition of the book only.

And don't forget: if you are going to discuss *The Da Vinci Code* you really do need to have read it.

The Da Vinci Code
Dan Brown (Corgi, 2004).

Stuart Bonnington is minister of Scot's Kirk, Fremantle. 



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Debunking the code

Try these discussion starters with non-Christian friends.

Here are some ideas and questions to ask people to take advantage of interest in *The Da Vinci Code* and get people thinking about Gospel issues.

Have you read *The Da Vinci Code*, by Dan Brown? If so, what did you think of it? If not, what have you heard about it?

The first page claims: "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate." The novel contains a series of startling statements about Jesus, the Bible, and the history of the church. Most of these statements are made to a fictional young woman named Sophie by a fictional historian, Leigh Teabing. The name "Sophie" comes from the Greek word for wisdom. Stop and ask God for wisdom before discussing the novel's teachings.

Teabing, the historian, tells Sophie, "...almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false" (p. 235). How do people generally respond to statements of experts? How does Galatians 1:6-9 tell us to respond to Teabing's claims?

Before systematically dismantling the main tenets of Christianity, Teabing asks Sophie, "How well do you know the New Testament?" She responds, "Not at all, really" (p. 230). How would you answer his question? Why is knowledge of Scripture a safeguard against error? What else helps us know the truth?

How would you respond to Teabing's statement, "The Bible is a product of man, my dear. Not of God" (p. 231)? What witnesses to the Bible's authenticity has God provided?

The Council of Nicaea was convened in 325 because a man named Arius was teaching that Jesus was a created being. The Council affirmed Jesus' divinity. Teabing tells Sophie, "...until that moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet ... a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless. A mortal" (p. 233). What evidence to the contrary do you find in the New Testament? In the lives and deaths of the apostles?

Teabing further asserts: "Not only was Jesus Christ married (to Mary Magdalene), but He was a father" (p.

249). Jesus "intended for the future of His Church to be in the hands of Mary Magdalene" (p. 248). Through procreating, Jesus was promoting "the sacred feminine and the goddess" (p. 238, also see p. 249). Ever heard of a tall tale? Why is this one particularly dangerous?

In what ways did Jesus affirm women? Who is in charge of the church? (See Colossians 1:17-18.) What does the Bible say about worshipping anyone except God Himself?

The Da Vinci Code applauds sex rites as "man's only bridge from earth to heaven" (p. 308) and accuses the Church of recasting sex as "disgusting and sinful" (p. 309). (In some cultures, sex was practiced as a "rite" or an element of pagan worship.) What's the truth about sex (Ephesians 5:31)? What light does Romans 1:24-25 shed on the novel's teachings?

In what ways does Teabing's conversation with Sophie resemble the conversa-

tion in Genesis 3:1-7?

Teabing draws many of his conclusions from hidden symbolism he sees in Leonardo Da Vinci's painting, *The Last Supper*, and ancient scrolls that deny Jesus' divinity and proclaim salvation by secret knowledge.

For each pair below, tell which has more credibility regarding Jesus' life and teachings—and why: a fictional historian or early church leaders; a painting completed in 1498 or Paul's letters from the first century; the four Gospels or scrolls written many years after the Gospels and discarded by the early church as heretical; a modern novelist or Jesus Himself.

According to 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12, why might people believe what *The Da Vinci Code* claims? How can Christians help someone confused by the novel's teachings? If you're confused, how will you seek the truth?

For further study, read *Cracking Da Vinci's Code*, by James L. Garlow & Peter Jones (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Victor, 2004) or www.breakingthedavincicode.com.

Deborah Brunt of Oklahoma City is a writer and speaker who challenges women to pivotal involvement in God's purposes. This article is taken from Journey magazine, a devotional guide for women published by LifeWay Church Resources (www.lifeway.com).

Deborah Brunt



'Constitution, Procedure and Practice' of the Presbyterian Church of Australia

'Constitution, Procedure and Practice' is the Code Book of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. The 2006 edition, authorised by the General Assembly of Australia and published by the Code Committee of that Assembly, is the first full edition since 1950.

The book has been printed on both sides of the page and each chapter begins on a new page so that when future alterations are made the whole chapter can be replaced. It will fit within the binder first issued in 1993. Copies are available from Miss Suzanne Jensen, Presbyterian Church in N.S.W., PO Box 2196, Strawberry Hills, NSW 2012, or through PTC Media in Melbourne.

The cost is:-

Printed insert only	\$13 plus postage
Binder only	\$5 plus postage
Printed insert and Binder	\$18 plus postage

A special price is available for students for the ministry.

It is also available on disk from Miss Jensen at a cost of \$5 plus postage.



Letters

Neglecting the sacraments

I was encouraged on reading the December issue of *AP* on Grace and the interview with Dr Michael Horton. Most of the issues and doctrines that were covered have been in the forefront of my thoughts and discussions over the last 24 years, that is, since my conversion. In a nutshell, the experience of my wife and myself with respect to the doctrines of free grace have been somewhat similar to Dr Horton's.

We spent time – not long – in the Uniting Church and nearly five years in an Arminian Baptist Church. This was followed by some time in an Independent congregation before joining the Presbyterian Church of Australia, of which I am an elder in the parish of Moree. The final question that you asked Michael Horton concerning the need for the sacraments – and, of course, the encouragement and discipline that should accompany their administration – is one, I believe, that is very relevant for our denomination today. It seems to me to be a trend in some of our Presbyterian Churches in NSW to neglect or compromise the sacrament of baptism and therefore church membership.

Ross Lee
Worriam Gurley, NSW

A ransom for all

Speaking of heresy, don't you think the emphasis on Grace as synonymous with unconditional election (*AP*, December) and the notion that Christ only died for all the sins of *some* men (*AP*, April 2005, p. 28) are sailing a bit close to the wind? I mean, very little room is left for the idea of human rejection of God, and there seems to be an assumption that God only works in the hearts of those who end up being saved.

I am happy, humble and grateful to accept that I am unconditionally elected. It is a great comfort and gives me a sense of purpose and I know that it is all God's work. However, I find the argument that Christ's death only applies to those who are saved is flawed. Just because someone is not saved doesn't mean Christ didn't die for them.

In *AP* in April 2005, Darren Middleton asks, "If Christ died for all men, but all men are not saved, what did His death really achieve?" He goes on to endorse John Owen's view that Christ died for "all the sins of *some* men." This does not make sense to me and I think it's also unscriptural.

Jesus tasted death "for everyone" (Heb. 2:9), He "gave Himself as a ransom for all men" (1 Tim. 2:6) and He "is the Saviour of all men, and especially of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4:10). Jesus "is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jn 2:2).

I may have misunderstood Middleton,

but he seems to imply that believing that Christ died for all men is to "deny covenant theology" and to introduce "the heresy of universalism". Not so. God sent His Son into the world to save the world through Him (John 3:17). I think that is why people will be judged, as they choose their own separation from God, something Middleton acknowledges, instead of accepting Jesus' separation from God on their behalf. In any case, we just don't know the extent to which God works in people's hearts.

Furthermore, we can't assume Christ *didn't* die for those who had no chance of coming to know Him.

David Matthews,
Sydney, NSW

Doctrine upholds truth

It is very true that something is lacking in the Presbyterian Church as Colin Steele says (Letters, *AP*, November), but I do not think that anyone can grieve the Holy Spirit in a desire for doctrinal correctness. For doctrinal correctness is simply upholding the Scriptures. It would be the other way around, we grieve the Holy Spirit when we are not doctrinally correct, when we do not uphold the Scriptures; when we do not obey them. If there is one thing the Presbyterian Church should be commended for, it is that it has upheld the Westminster Confession of Faith through many trying times. The sad thing is that it has not produced the fruit it should have. This leads one to conjecture that it has upheld doctrinal correctness in name only.

This is the case, for the great failure of the Western Church has been the undermining of faith through liberalism. Liberalism is not only intellectual poverty it is heresy and blasphemy. It is blasphemy to deny the attributes of God. It is blasphemy to say that the Scriptures contradict themselves. It is practical heresy to speak Christ and practise psychology. Yet the Church has used psychology in determining a candidate's suitability for ministry.

It is man's intellectual pride that causes him to accept liberal ideas. Worldwide, the theological colleges have done so. It is this that has grieved the Spirit. When God's people honour the Word in their hearts the Spirit is there and the church grows. Let us look again at Ps. 119: "Thy testimonies are wonderful."

Neil Cadman,
Norman Park, Qld

Ryde Presbyterian Church is seeking God's guidance for the calling of a new pastor to fill the vacancy. Rev Andrew Unwin's ministry has transitioned Ryde from a traditional ministry to a church that is set to take up the mission challenges of the twenty-first century. Ryde has great facilities, adequate financial resources and a small enthusiastic warm hearted congregation ready to be led to the next phase of mission. Ryde's eldership is committed to the gospel and keen to see the church grow as a place of discipleship, evangelism, pastoral care and worship. The city of Ryde is a culturally, racially and socially diverse urban centre. Huge urban consolidation is seeing a growing and diverse mission field on the doorstep. Ryde is ready to be led by a godly pastor who is committed to the word and has a great love of building up the body of Christ as well as reaching out to the lost. Ryde defines its mission as:

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Ryde is praying that God would raise up such a person and to facilitate this process our interim moderator Rev Richard Quadrio is very keen to hear from anyone who has sensed a calling to move to take up such an opportunity. All the normal Presbyterian terms of call are offered. Please contact us if you are interested in finding out more about this opportunity.

All enquiries to richard@macchap.com.au
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Net: get logical

Some of the most difficult issues Christians will have to deal with in the 21st century will relate to technology. Given that the internet will probably become the dominant communication, information and entertainment medium, we need to consider carefully how to respond to it. When it comes to internet content, many people repeat the mantra of "consenting adults should be able to view what they wish". This is an illogical position. TV, radio and newspapers are all subject to some form of regulation and the internet should not be an exception. Indeed, the detrimental effect of internet violence and pornography upon society in general and children in particular is becoming increasingly evident. The average teenager spends 15 hours per week on the internet and protecting them from unwanted content should be paramount.

Under the current system, access to disturbing material is the norm, and the onus is upon people who do not want to see it to "opt out". Surely a better system would reverse this norm by establishing a national

system that filters out offensive material. Families would be protected while people still wishing to view this material could go out of their way to "opt in". The technology has caught up and, while not completely perfect, it would make a tangible difference to Australian society.

*Jim Wallace AM,
executive chairman,
Australian Christian Lobby, Canberra*

Tolerating difference

I was bemused to read the article by Mark Steyn (*AP*, March 2006) and wondered how it would help build up the Body of Christ. Out of curiosity I checked out his website and was stunned: how does one man generate so much bile and be so proud of it? (By the way, he is Canadian, not American.)

Whatever one thinks of multiculturalism and however poorly sinful man has lived it, it is part of post-Fall humanity, from the poly-lingual Babel to the multi-ethnic heaven in John's vision. Extremist positions that cannot tolerate difference,

whether Muslim, Zionist, Catholic or Protestant (witness Northern Ireland in our time) lead to disaster and death.

We should look at how our Lord Jesus handled multiculturalism (Mt. 8:5-13; Mk 7:26-30; Jn 4:1-30). Or how the apostle Paul dealt with another situation (Acts 17:16-34). Surely the debate between Peter Barnes and Diaa Mohamed, reported in the same issue of *AP*, follows biblical principles and will help fulfil God's will for the church.

*John Yeo
Glen Waverley, Vic*

A bouquet

I have thoroughly enjoyed reading *AP*. I believe your magazine is the best denominational magazine available, and I extol your good work.

May God continue to bless Australia, and the world, through your diligent labors.

*Rev. Dr. Ligon Duncan III
Moderator
Presbyterian Church of America*



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prayer

April 2006

- 21 Pray for the Interim moderator Peter Thorneycroft, preachers and filling of the vacancy in Ulverstone parish northern Tasmania with about 100 c&a (communicants and adherents), 10 yf (younger folk – Sunday School and youth) and 2 e (elders).
- 22 St Paul's Lismore parish northern NSW including Nimbin with about 315 c&a, 25 yf and 21 e; Gaius Goh.
- 23 Mr Robin Watson from South Toowoomba, Qld *mission partners* (APWM) worker in translation and literacy among the Fulani people of Burkina Faso, west Africa with SIM.
- 24 Hong Ki Ahn and Esther in his exit appointment with Ki-Ok Jung at Antioch Korean parish Strathfield NSW with about 250 c&a, and 110 yf.
- 25 David and Ashleigh from Ashfield NSW *mission partners* (APWM) workers in Mongolia with Pioneers of Australia involved in theological teaching.
- 26 The students and staff of Presbyterian Ladies College, Burwood Vic.; Elaine Collin incoming principal; Charles Green chaplain.
- 27 Andrew & Fleur Letcher from Eltham Vic. *mission partners* (APWM) workers in administration at Wycliffe Bible Translators HQ, Kangaroo Ground Vic.
- 28 Presbytery of Hastings NSW North coast – 7 parishes and 2 home mission stations totaling 16 congregations with about 1330 c&a and 320 yf, 1 theological candidate, 4 retired ministers. John Rooimans clerk.
- 29 Alex and Tracey Banks from Stanthorpe, Qld *mission partners* (APWM) workers in Pusan, Korea engaged in evangelism through English teaching with OMF.

- 30 Somerville parish Melbourne with about 70 c&a, 10 yf and 2 e; Ian and Heather Brown.

May 2006

- 1 Mt Barker home mission station with about 50 c&a, 5 yf and 3 e; Rupert Hanna.
- 2 Families and communities in North Queensland recovering from the cyclone devastation in March.
- 3 Ashleigh and Sarah from Croydon Hills, Melbourne *mission partners* (APWM) workers in computing, administration and hospitality with Middle East Christian Outreach.
- 4 The law officers of Assemblies including Gregory Burton, Simon Fraser, (GAA and NSW) David Mitchell, Brian Bayston (Vic.) and Peter Cruse (WA).
- 5 Caloundra parish north of Brisbane including Maleny with about 145 c&a, 10 yf and 9 e; Ian McIver, recently inducted, and Norma.
- 6 Pray for the Interim moderator David Enderby, preachers and filling of the vacancy in Trundle parish (western NSW) including Tullamore and Tottenham with about 75 c&a, 45 yf and 5 e.
- 7 Pray for the Interim moderator Keith Allen, preachers and filling of the vacancy for a church planter in Daylesford appointment parish Vic. with about 10 c&a, 5 yf and 2 e.
- 8 Presbytery of Torrens (Adelaide and northern SA) 3 parishes and 5 home mission stations totaling 9 congregations with about 300 c&a and 95 yf, 1 theological candidate, 1 retired minister and 1 under jurisdiction. Reg. Mathews clerk.
- 9 The debates, teaching and fellowship at the South Australian General Assembly meeting at Mt Barker – Rupert Hanna moderator, Brian

Johnson clerk, convenors and commissioners.

- 10 The work of all agencies involved in producing and distributing Scripture, such as the Bible Societies, Bible League and Lifewords (formerly the Scripture Gift Mission).
- 11 Noel and Catherine Carpenter from Hobart *mission partners* (APWM) workers in aviation in the Northern Territory with MAF/WBT.
- 12 Bassendean home mission station Perth with about 50 c&a, 3 yf and 2 e; Ross and Sue Fraser.
- 13 All members of federal and state parliaments, whether in government, opposition, minor parties or independent, and especially those who are committed Christians.
- 14 Tanworth Community Presbyterian Church NSW with about 125 c&a, 90 yf and 5 e; Keith and Vivian Walker, Phillip and Lydia Chang.
- 15 The debates, teaching and fellowship at the Tasmanian General Assembly – the moderator, David Turner, clerk, convenors and commissioners.
- 16 Scots Kirk, Mosman Sydney with about 180 c&a, 10 yf and 13 e; Adrian and Diane de Graaf.
- 17 Benalla Regional parish Vic. Including Balmattum and Thoona with about 180 c&a, 65 yf and 11 e; Peter Stanton.
- 18 Presbytery of North Queensland 6 parishes and 5 home mission stations totaling 14 congregations with about 895 c&a and 350 yf, 1 defense chaplain, 2 retired ministers and 2 under jurisdiction. Rudi Schwartz clerk.
- 19 Christine Platt from Orange, NSW *mission partners* (APWM) worker in Loja, Ecuador as a radio engineer with SIM.
- 20 Wentworthville parish, western Sydney with about 140 c&a, 15 yf and 5 e; Luke and Debra Tattersall.

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Books

Unspeakable: Facing up to Evil in an Age of Genocide and Terror

Os Guinness
San Francisco, Harper, 2005
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

Os Guinness asks: “Is there anything harder to face and figure out than evil?” Liberal thinkers are fond of glib answers and, after every atrocity, pious clichés abound along the lines of “never again”. But civilisation has not succeeded in abolishing cruelty and evil. In this most thoughtful piece of work, Guinness does not shirk the hard questions nor the unfashionable answers. According to Gore Vidal, “the great unmentionable evil at the centre of our culture is monotheism”. After the terror of September 11, the New York Times pontificated that the culprit was “religious totalitarianism” – any religious faith that made exclusive claims. Richard Dawkins too thinks that if only we could replace the Te Deum with John Lennon’s *Imagine*, all would be sweetness and light. Against this, Guinness asserts that “more people in the 20th century were killed by secularist regimes, led by secularist intellectuals and in the name of secularist ideologies, than in all the religious persecutions in Western history”.

Ambrose Bierce wrote that “the defining feature of humanity is inhumanity”. During the Bosnian war, a young Muslim woman was repeatedly raped in front of her husband and father while her baby screamed nearby. After the ordeal, she begged permission to be able to nurse the baby. One of her rapists decapitated the baby, and threw the head into the mother’s lap. Surely only monsters could perform such a wicked act. Yet Hannah Arendt found that Adolf Eichmann was so ordinary that she wrote of “the banality of evil”. The unimaginable becomes thinkable, then fashionable.

The modern amoral approach to sin and evil leaves us as those who sin but without a vocabulary to describe it. William Golding wrote *Lord of the Flies*, and concluded that World War II showed that “man produces evil as a bee produces honey”. W. H. Auden also discovered that

he had to investigate Christian terms in order to respond to the Nazi invasion of Poland, and those in a Yorkville cinema who cheered it. To coldly analyse such a situation, as one might seek to solve a mathematical problem, is woefully inadequate. It was Churchill who declared: “I decline utterly to be impartial between the fire brigade and the fire.”

Guinness’ book makes for grim reading, but reality demands that we face these facts. “Where was God at Auschwitz?” is a real question. But so too is “where was man?”

Peter Barnes is books editor of AP.

Jesus and Muhammad

Mark A. Gabriel
Florida: Charisma House, 2004.
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

Mark Gabriel is a converted Muslim who memorised the Koran by the age of 12, came through the prestigious Al-Azhar University, went through increasing concerns about Islam, and survived arrest by the Egyptian secret police. He became a Christian after a woman pharmacist gave him a Bible. When he was first converted, Christian pastors were not at all keen to know him – which is both sad and instructive.

Gabriel’s starting point is that “without doubt, Jesus and Muhammad are the two most influential persons who ever lived”. The book brings out the differences between the two men in a way that consistently appeals to the evidence. The differences are, in the end, immense, but facts must be faced. Muhammad washed his followers’ swords, but Jesus washed His followers’ feet. Hopefully, this work will help to inform Christians and to challenge Muslims.

Awakening The Life and Ministry of Robert Murray McCheyne

David Robertson
Paternoster, 2004
Reviewed by Stuart Bonnington

Robertson is the minister of St. Peter’s Free Church in Dundee, Scotland. This is the church that once was pastored by Robert Murray McCheyne himself, who

is probably best known today for his famous Bible reading guide. McCheyne was a very notable Christian and minister who enjoyed periods of great blessing from the Lord in his local church ministry as well as wide gospel work he was involved in. If you don’t know his story this book is a very good place to start, and if you do you will want to add this book to your collection dealing with McCheyne. Robertson tells the story of McCheyne well, with each chapter ending with a “meditation” and a prayer.

Stuart Bonnington is minister of Scot’s Kirk, Fremantle.

New Life in the Wasteland

Douglas F. Kelly
Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2003.
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

The subtitle of this work is “2 Corinthians on the Cost and Glory of Christian Ministry”, and it uses T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* as its launching pad. The result is a stimulating treatment of some of the major motifs in 2 Corinthians, applied with much perception to the modern situation. Kelly is one of those rare men who is steeped in theological understanding but who also knows the contemporary world.

His illustrations are always helpful. For example, when dealing with Paul’s reluctant defence of himself against criticism by false apostles, Kelly points out that it is always difficult when one is criticised. Kelly begins his treatment of 2 Corinthians 10 by referring to a plaque that was in the surgery of his cousin who was a doctor. The plaque read: “In order to avoid criticism: say nothing, do nothing, be nothing.”

In an age where difficulties in ministry are claiming many casualties, 2 Corinthians provides food for the fortification of the soul, and Kelly’s work illuminates what God has given us. Before desperate ministers head off to the next seminar on church growth or leadership in the church, they would be well-advised to work through 2 Corinthians with a copy of Kelly’s book nearby.

Are you serious?

Christian gravitas in a narcissistic age

The question of whether particular people are saved, or are converted, or are believers, is often heard in evangelical circles. We recognise it in some form as a necessary question, because it points to the momentous passage from spiritual death to spiritual life that everyone needs, and does so in a way that excludes the sacramentalist fancy that merely being baptised makes you safe forever.

Not all, however, are happy with the question in this form, for in the first place it seems to assume that everyone who ever comes to faith will have a dramatic Damascus Road experience to testify to, which is not so, and in the second place we find that some who testify volubly to conversion experiences that brought them to faith turn out to be hypocrites and frauds. Does the question as to whether people are spiritually alive or dead have to be asked in these terms?

No, it does not, nor has it always been. For half a century, up till 50 years ago, it was regularly put thus: do they love the Lord? That was a good way of focusing the question, for it zeros in on what people are in the present rather than on what they experienced in the past, and love of the Saviour-King who loved us and gave himself for us really is the heart of Christian life.

Before that, in England at the turn of the century, Anglican evangelicals used to ask whether people had become serious. This also, I think, was a good way of putting the question, once one understood what was implied. Let me spell out the meaning that the question carried.

First, however, a negation, lest we jump to the wrong conclusion at the outset. The question did not mean: have these folk become somber and long-faced?



J. I. Packer

Have they given up cracking jokes, and laughing when others crack them? Do they now take themselves terribly seriously? Yesterday's evangelicals knew as well as we do that self-centred seriousness and posturing piosity of that sort is unspiritual and unbalancing, if not actually unbalanced. (Did you know the word piosity, by the way? – it's British slang, very useful for puncturing the pretentiousness of the pompous. I recommend that you add the term to your vocabulary.)

The truth here is that if you mortify your sense of humor and lose the ability to laugh at yourself you are actually screwing down one of the safety valves of your sanity. There is nothing godly about doing that. Such action produces people who are profoundly proud, utterly unrealistic, frequently fanatical, and always intolerable to live with. In the hearts of all who are genuinely holy, along with their intensity in adoring the Father and the Son, goes a sense of their own silliness, absurdity, and intrinsic unimportance before the Lord, who as they know could get along very well without them. Their refusal to take themselves too seriously, paradoxical as it may sound, is in fact one expression of their evangelical seriousness.

Their refusal to take themselves too seriously, paradoxically, is one expression of their evangelical seriousness.

eternity, which are settled for good or ill by the choices we make now.

Serious writers are those who focus on the long-term, deep-level implications of their themes and point up these implications in what they put out. Serious Christians are those who perceive the eternal implication of the life they live now. They make decisions in light of the eternal realities of God's love and wrath, God's heaven and hell, which will still be there for us after we have left this world and indeed will still be there after this world itself has ceased to be. That is the seriousness that we speak of here.

A recent essay in *Time* dealt with "the gravitas factor" (gravitas is Latin for seriousness in our sense and was evidently used because the writer did not think any English word can now be trusted to carry his full weight of meaning). The essay distinguished between public figures whose actions showed them to be thoroughly and far-seeingly serious, like Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher, as compared with leaders who seemed not to think or care about the long-term effects of what they did, so that they became corks tossing around uselessly on the waters of change and crisis, like – well, never mind. Purposeful people like Churchill and Thatcher model for us real Christian seriousness, of which they represent the secular counterpart.

In a narcissistic age like ours, the question of seriousness presses Christians uncomfortably. We can be bright believers, burbling away about our wonderful conversion and still be living frivolous, unstable, ego-tripping lives. We run from one brief enthusiasm to another, constantly pursuing way-out novelties of belief and behavior, and earning for ourselves at home, in church and in the wider community David Niven's biting comment on Errol Flynn: At least you knew where you were with him; he always let you down. Steady seriousness is one mark of right-living Christians. Am I serious? Are you?

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