

A U S T R A L I A N

# Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

february 2007



SMALL *is*  
BEAUTIFUL TOO

John Benton • Strength in weakness • God's mysterious will

Presbyterian Theological Centre –  
Sydney



GRADUATION  
CEREMONY  
AND  
COMMENCEMENT  
SERVICE

Wednesday 14th March 2007  
at 7.30pm

To be held at  
St James Presbyterian Church  
Belmore Street, Burwood



The Occasional Address will be given by

**Rev. David Jones**

Minister, Cornerstone Presbyterian Church  
Hobart, Tasmania

GAA  
CHRISTIAN  
EDUCATION  
RESOURCE  
CENTRE

PTC Media,  
684 Elgar Road,  
Box Hill North 3129  
PHONE: 0400 880 515  
EMAIL: [ptcmedia@presbyteriancollege.org](mailto:ptcmedia@presbyteriancollege.org)

(Please make all  
cheques payable  
to the Presbyterian  
Church of Victoria)

AT THE COALFACE

An introduction to  
Presbyterian Eldership  
\$6.60

The best selling  
WESTMINSTER  
CONFESSION  
OF FAITH FOR THE  
21ST CENTURY –  
STUDY EDITION

\$15 + \$3 pp –  
prepared by DJW Milne,  
Principal of the PTC Melbourne.  
**THE SIX PACK:** for  
Sessions/Bible study groups  
6 copies of the WCF-21C  
for \$92 posted!

MAKING FRIENDS  
FOR LIFE

\$8.50



Presbyterian  
Theological  
College

Join us in 2007 for a program of study options

- train for cross-cultural ministry
- commence theological study (bachelor or masters level)
- equip yourself for lay ministry (short courses)
- develop your ministry skills (MA graduate study)
- prepare for full-time ministry

Full-time, part-time, evening, intensives  
Start in February or July



enquire now:  
Presbyterian Theological College  
684 Elgar Road  
Box Hill North Vic 3129  
Phone: 03 9898 9384  
Email: [info@presbyteriancollege.org](mailto:info@presbyteriancollege.org)  
Website: [www.presbyteriancollege.org](http://www.presbyteriancollege.org)

Visiting  
Western  
Queensland?

WORSHIP WITH US AT THE  
**MARANOA**  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
ROMA, OPPOSITE POLICE STATION

Worship Service  
**SUNDAY 9AM**

Contact: REV. WALTER JONES  
AT MILES ON (07) 4654 3100

FREE TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION IS  
AVAILABLE FOR VISITING MINISTERS OR LAY  
PREACHERS OF THE REFORMED TRADITION IN  
RETURN FOR PREACHING ARRANGEMENTS

February 2007

No. 589

# AUSTRALIAN Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

## CHURCH

Lean and fit: John Benton . . . . .	4
Satan's schemes: Peter Hastie . . . . .	10
Rushing to eternity: Peter Barnes . . . . .	12

## BIBLE STUDY

Instruction manual	
20 Bible studies in Matthew 13-17 . . . . .	13

## NEWS

Across Australia . . . . .	19
Around the World . . . . .	20
On the Agenda . . . . .	22

## REFLECTION

God's mysterious will: Sinclair Ferguson . . . . .	24
--	----

## CHURCH

Strength in weakness: Barney Zwartz . . . . .	25
---	----

## BOOKS . . . . . 28

T. F. Torrance: Stuart Bonnington	
What the Bible Teaches About Guidance: Peter Bloomfield	
Under the Scaffold: Faith Cook	
Amy Carmichael: Carine Mackenzie	

## PRAYER . . . . . 30

## LETTERS . . . . . 31

## BACK PAGE

Welfare to work: Peter Barnes . . . . .	32
---	----

# editorial

**T**his issue of *Australian Presbyterian* is dedicated to the many Christians throughout our nation who belong to small churches of under 50 members.

On any Lord's Day within Australia many ministers within the Presbyterian Church will experience the phenomenon of preaching to small groups of believers who may not total more than 20 people. This is especially so in remote rural areas, but it is also the case where new church plants have been established or where full-time pastoral care is unavailable.

My first year in the ministry introduced me to the small church. I had been sent to a rural area in north-eastern Victoria to serve an older congregation which had been established only recently. We owned no property and were forced to meet at 8:30am in rented premises on the outskirts of the town. Some 25 to 30 brave souls gathered each week – even during winter, when the temperatures were close to freezing! Throughout our first year the numbers remained unchanged, but slowly the church began to grow.

Some time afterwards our congregation established a new church in a town about an hour away. This was an even smaller congregation which attracted about 15 faithful members on a good day, fewer during holidays and bad weather. Several years later our church established another congregation some distance away in the Ovens Valley. Our first service there was held in the supper room of a local sports centre because no church facilities were available. We started with 10 people. Welcome to the small church!

Despite the smallness of each of these churches, I learnt an important lesson: God loves the small church and He can bless it. He delights to use small things to shame those that are large and attractive so that it may be apparent that the power is due to Him (1 Cor. 1:27). It is easy for church growth theorists and those who are enamoured with bigness to look down on small churches. In this issue we want to encourage the many smaller congregations in Australia who are bearing a faithful witness to God. I have discovered that some of the most impressive Christians that I have ever met have grown up in such circumstances.

Peter Hastie <sup>ap</sup>

THE AUSTRALIAN PRESBYTERIAN (ABN 81 498 399 755): The national magazine of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. Editorial committee: Peter Hastie (NSW) Themes Editor; Barney Zwartz (Victoria) Production; Stuart Bonnington (West Australia) News Editor; World News c/- Editor. Graphic Design: Sandra Joynt for A&J Moody Design: www.ajmd.com.au. Advertising and subscription inquiries: Walter Bruining, PO Box 375, Kilsyth 3137; Phone: (03) 9723 9684. Subscription: \$38.50 a year inc. GST; bulk (etc) \$35.20 each inc. GST. Office: PO Box 375, Kilsyth 3137. Phone: (03) 9723 9684. Fax: (03) 9723 9685. Email: aus-pres@bigpond.net.au Printed by Adept Mail & Print Services, Boronia, Vic. Published: Monthly except January by the National Journal Committee of the Presbyterian Church of Australia; Convener Peter Hastie. Opinions expressed are those of the contributor and not necessarily those of the PCA, the editor or the committee. Acceptance of advertising does not imply endorsement. Contributions: Submitted articles are welcome. The deadline is the first of the previous month. Donations are always welcome. Print Post approved 34918100384. [www.ap.presbyterian.org.au](http://www.ap.presbyterian.org.au)

# Lean and fit

*Small churches have a special part to play in God's plan.*



**D**r John Benton is the pastor of the Chertsey Street Baptist Church in Guildford, Surrey. He was converted at 15 and later obtained a doctorate in science in theoretical chemistry and quantum mechanics from the University of Sussex. While an undergraduate student there, he met his wife, Ann, and in his own words, "I've been doing the follow-up ever since." He later taught at Liverpool University.

He was called to be the pastor of his church in 1980. John also serves as the managing editor of *Evangelicals Now* and has written several books, including *Losing Touch With the Living God*, *Slandering the Angels*, *Straightening Out the Self-Centred Church* (all in the Welwyn Series), *One World, One Way*, and *What's Going On Out There?* He has also written *The Big Picture for Small Churches – How To Thrive and Survive as a Small Congregation* (Evangelical Press) in which he emphasises that it is the health of a church, not its size, that is important.

John and Ann have four children, Matthew, Tom, Jessica and Owen.

---

## John Benton talks to Peter Hastie

---

**John, why did you decide to write a book about small churches? It's sort of a counter-cultural thing to do in Christian circles, isn't it?**

Yes, I suppose it is these days. I did so for a number of reasons. First, this church was fairly small when I first came to it. If you compared it with the bigger churches in Guildford, it seemed insignificant. Obviously the church is not as small now and the congregation has grown in size and maturity. Chertsey Street Baptist Church is part of the Reformed Baptist movement. Generally speaking, our denomination is made up of fairly small churches. Now it happened that a few years ago I was asked to go and speak up in the north of England to a conference in Yorkshire about encouraging small churches. This forced me to think through a lot of issues and so my book on *The Big Picture for Small Churches* encapsulates my understanding of what the Bible teaches about this subject.

ulates my understanding of what the Bible teaches about this subject.

I love small churches; I have preached in many of them in the UK. They are all very dear folk and I understand the anguish that they sometimes feel because of their smallness. They are good people but somehow they feel that they are not as good as other people who are in bigger churches, and my heart just goes out to them. And that's what prompted me to write my book.

As soon as I started thinking along these lines I thought, "John, you had better put pen to paper on this one and write to encourage other people". So I started to write. The funny thing is that the more research I did on this subject the more I realised that the Lord so often starts in a very small way. God's interested in things that are small. I know that may sound counter-cultural, but it's certainly biblical. He takes one man, Noah. He takes one couple, Abraham and Sarah, and He works from there. So I felt that I was clicking into something that was very important. I think it's particularly important in our modern culture where every-

thing is big and you are made to feel useless unless you are big. God doesn't think like that.

### **John, what's your real concern for small churches and what exactly do you mean by a "small church"?**

The reason why I am concerned for small churches is that in the West, as well as in parts of Asia, a large number of churches fall into this category. While I am well aware that the mega-churches are the ones that seem to attract all the interest and attention these days, the reality is that, for the most part, Christians are more likely to find themselves in a small to average-size church. So it makes sense to me to think carefully about how I can encourage and support believers who find themselves in such a situation.

What is a small church? I wasn't quite sure to begin with. I asked Christian Research, which is a UK group that does a lot of statistics on churches. They gave me this rule of thumb: a small church is any congregation with less than 50 people in attendance. An "average" church, they said, is anywhere between 50 and 150 people. Anything above 150 they categorised as large. They added that any church bigger than 350 was "very large".

So, according to Christian Research, any congregation of less than 50 is "small". However, in all honesty, I'm aware of congregations of between 15 and 20 people. So my heart is very much for these dear folk. When I write about small churches I am thinking of congregations of between 15 and 40 people, and there are lots of these sorts of congregations around – far more than we expect.

### **Is there anything wrong with a church being small? Is it a sign of poor leadership or spiritual problems?**

Not necessarily, although it could be. I think that Christians need to understand that there is nothing wrong with being small. When Paul shared the gospel in Philippi, the church that developed there was quite small in its earlier stages. It probably consisted of Lydia, the business woman, the jailer and his family, along with the slave girl from whom Paul had cast out the demon. Obviously the church grew from there. Paul also mentions other churches which met in houses in the first century, so they wouldn't have been very big (see Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15). The point is that we don't consider that a baby or child has a problem simply because they

haven't reached the size of their father or mother.

Furthermore, sometimes God's strategy is to keep churches small. Although the Western media has hardly noticed it, over the last 50 years the world's greatest spiritual awakening has been taking place in China. Christian demographers believe that there are now more than 60 million believers there. Yet many of these Christians meet in small fellowships. In a book called *Operation China*, the author points out that in Yunnan province there are about 300 Christians among the Jino people. They live in the jungle and mountainous areas of the province. The author says that there are 31 churches among the Jino. Do the maths to calculate the average size of each of those churches!

Obviously, they are very small. Nevertheless, God has raised them up and it seems that these small groups are best suited to serve the Christians there at the moment.

The size of many of the Protestant churches in

France today is also a case in point. Missiologists have suggested that smaller churches, never exceeding 40 to 60 people, are right for their situation. There are a couple of cultural reasons for this. First, French people seem to be suspicious of large and powerful churches based on their experience of the behaviour of the Roman Catholic Church in the past. They are more attracted to a church with close personal relationships as in a family. Of course, this only works where churches are relatively small.

The second reason why the French seem to prefer small churches is that their cultural values of liberty, equality and fraternity are important to them; they like to have their say in decision-making. Being in a small church makes it more likely for this to happen. So I think that in certain situations small churches can be the design of God. In China and France this seems to be the case.

### **Should people be discouraged by the fact that they attend a small church? If not, why?**

No, I don't think people should be discouraged by the size of their fellowship. It

seems to me that the most important question to ask is: are they receiving faithful Christian ministry and is God really working in their lives? Having said that, I understand that in a society of large corporations, big governments and giant shopping malls it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that unless an organisation is really big it's not worth looking at. The day of the corner shop seems to be disappearing.

Unfortunately, television has conditioned us into thinking that it's only things that are big and newsworthy that are worth thinking about. Gradually, people have become sensitised to this way of viewing life. It's a cultural bias that really has no basis in Scripture. Christians need to remember that God often starts in small and rather insignificant ways. Jesus makes this point when he talks about the coming of the kingdom. It comes in an inconspicuous manner (Mark 4:30-32). I think this gives us enormous encouragement not to be downcast by numbers. The Lord can save in whatever way He chooses – whether by many or by few. We need to recognise this cultural bias towards bigness for what it is – a worldly idea with no foundation in the Bible.

Having said that, I want to add that if our churches are small because we know there's something spiritually wrong and we are doing nothing about it, then that's an entirely different matter. But simply being small is not a problem in God's eyes. I don't think we should be discouraged simply because of our size. Large numbers at church are not necessarily a sign of health, as Jeremiah reminds us (Jer. 7:1-15).

### **Is there any indication in the letters to the Seven Churches in Revelation that there's something wrong with being a small church?**

No, on the contrary, there appears to be some recognition that it is okay to be small. In the letter to the church of Philadelphia, Christ says: "I know that you have but little strength..." (Rev. 3:8). Some commentators, like John Stott, have suggested that it seems likely that what is meant is that the congregation was not large. The letter to the church in Philadelphia is one of only two letters among the seven in which Christ does not accuse them of wrongdoing. Since the churches in Philadelphia and in Smyrna faced serious persecution, it is more than likely that they were smaller than the other churches who were rebuked.

**Do you think God has a special strategy in having lots of small churches around the world? For instance, there are some situations in Communist and Islamic countries where it's impossible to have large public gatherings. Are small groups of believers part of God's plan?**

Yes, I certainly think that's true. I've already mentioned the phenomenon of smaller churches in France and China and some of the cultural reasons for this. There are obviously some situations where people are more comfortable in smaller churches than larger ones. There is no doubt that people prize a sense of family in their church where each individual feels that they are known and where they believe they can contribute. Again, that only works within a group of probably less than 100 people. Once you get bigger than that you start running into the problems of saying "Hello, are you new here?" and the person replies: "Well, actually I've been coming for the past nine months and you've obviously never noticed." Unfortunately that's the sort of thing that often happens when the church gets bigger. So I think God does have His strategy in that.

On the other hand, I want to make it clear that we should always want to grow. God expects us to grow in spiritual maturity and to be involved in evangelism.

Christians should be seeking to witness to the lost. I certainly don't want to give the message that it's all right to be small and you needn't try to grow. I am not saying that. What I am saying is, "Let's try to grow through witness and service, but let's recognise that the size of the church is in God's sovereign hands." We must be obedient to the Lord and reach out, but let's not thrash ourselves if under God's sovereign purpose there isn't immediate

revival or enormous growth.

**If the smallness of a church is not the real problem, what is?**

The real problems that churches face are spiritual in nature. I can't find anywhere in the New

Testament where smallness as such is flagged as the real spiritual problem. The problems with churches are never to do with numbers. The idea that we have solved our problems if we grow the church in size is wrong. An increase in numbers may simply mask more serious issues. The letters to the Seven Churches

in the Book of Revelation remind us that the basic problems that churches face are spiritual ones.

**What are the spiritual problems that cause you more concern than small numbers?**

The things that concern Christ are doctrinal deviation, moral failure, factions in the church, people fighting one another, worldliness, and a lack of heart for evangelism. The number of people in a church is never mentioned as a problem. God can work with any number of people – whether many or few. The Bible says that (1 Sam. 14:6).

I often remind small churches about the story of Noah. It was eight people against the world. Eight – that's all! Was the whole world wrong except these eight people? Yes, it was. Often the devil comes to people in small churches and says "Who do you think you are? Isn't it rather arrogant to think that in this town of thousands of people, you alone – just the 20 or 30 of you – have got it right?" Yet this was precisely the situation for Noah and his family. The whole world was wrong; only Noah and his small family were saved. No one else survived the flood.

We see the same principle at work in Gideon's war against the Midianites. God actually says to Gideon that he has too many men in his army. The reason why God used only a small number of men was that He was concerned that people might think that Israel's success in battle was due to the nation's strength and not God's power. If this happened, the Israelites would be tempted to give glory to themselves. They would go around saying, "Well, of course, we have this wonderful army etc". However, God wanted to put Gideon in a situation where it was totally obvious that there was no other reason why the Israelites had won the battle apart from God Himself. That's why the Lord cut down Gideon's force to only 300 men.

The same principle applies today. Is anyone surprised when people are taken along to some enormous evangelistic meeting with thousands of people and suddenly "get religion"? I don't think anyone is surprised because they put it down to crowd control, manipulative preaching and lots of emotional music. People know that you can produce these sorts of effects in large crowds. They just put it down to the hype, you know, to the emotion of the situation. But if people are saved in a small congregation where there

*We need to recognise this cultural bias towards bigness for what it is – a worldly idea with no foundation in the Bible.*

**Reformers' Bookshop**



**BOOKSHOP MANAGER**

An exciting opportunity has arisen to be the manager of a well-regarded, evangelical, reformed bookshop. This bookshop has been established for over twenty years as a ministry of Stanmore Baptist Church and is located in Stanmore, in Sydney.

In order to grow the bookshop, Stanmore Baptist Church is intending to enter into a joint venture arrangement with the Theological Education Committee of the Presbyterian Church of NSW. This will permit the appointment of a full-time manager; will allow the bookshop to grow and to reach out to a much larger number of Christians.

The successful applicant will be a committed Christian in active fellowship with a Christian Church, who enjoys a bookshop environment and who values our reformed heritage.

The person will need to be a self-starter with good people skills.

Competency with numbers and the ability to organise volunteer labour are highly desirable.

Experience in bookselling or bookshop management would be well regarded.

Basic computer skills would be an advantage.

**Package \$55,000 - \$60,000**

Initial enquiries may be made to Pastor Ian O'Harae on (02) 9519 9484 or 0400 100 706.

Alternatively, you can email Ian on [ioharae@une.edu.au](mailto:ioharae@une.edu.au).

**Applications close on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2007. Written applications (including full resume and names of three referees) should be sent to:**

**Stanmore Baptist Church, 140 Albany Rd, Petersham, 2049,**

**marked "Confidential, attention Bookshop Governing Committee."**

are none of those things, then it does make people think “what on earth has got into them?” It might just be that they begin to take seriously the fact that God has met with these people.

The Scripture tells us that God works through small and simple means. Moses uses a rod to separate the Red Sea and to provide the Israelites with water in the wilderness. Jesus uses a small boy’s lunch to feed 5000 people. Small things in the hands of the Lord can have huge effects. That’s when the glory goes to God. I believe that it’s important for small churches to see themselves in that kind of way.

**You’ve said that the basic problems behind the dwindling churches in Britain are not sociological. In your opinion, what are the real reasons?**

I think a number of things need to be mentioned here. First, I believe that it’s the judgment of God upon our land. We are suffering under the Lord’s discipline. England went through a cultural crisis in the 1960s. I grew up in this period and I think one of the great turning-points was the publication of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* in 1961. That was a moment of moral crisis in the nation. Second, I think the church has become far too middle-class and has lost the notion of radical discipleship. Today, Christians have settled for a comfortable view of life and our expectations as far as jobs and standards of living are concerned are no different from those of unbelievers. Christians want a nice salary, a large house and to enjoy their church experience, but they don’t want to be challenged to live a life of sacrifice as radical disciples. The simple fact is that the church no longer understands what it means to “take up the cross”.

The other problem is that the church has kept a culpable silence on serious moral issues of our day such as abortion, homosexuality and the like. When these issues were first raised I don’t recall any national church leaders speaking out vigorously against these things. Even evangelicals went quiet. They ignored it all and said that their task was simply to get on with evangelism.

**So there was no prophetic voice raised against these things?**

Not a word, as far as I can remember; not even from men whom I respected as great leaders. They seemed to be culturally disengaged. Of course, I could be wrong because I was a lot younger at the time, but I just don’t remember hearing

any notable British church leaders speak about these issues until Dr Francis Schaeffer stood up and condemned abortion. I distinctly remember that. But all through the ’60s I don’t remember any of the evangelical leaders standing up and saying “look, we ought to be organising ourselves against this and we ought to let the parliament and our national leaders know that this is wrong”.

The sad thing is that it took about another 30 years for evangelicals to twig that the gospel actually has moral implications and that we had a responsibility to make God’s will on these issues known.



**Remember Noah. It was eight people against the world. Was the whole world wrong except these eight people? Yes, it was.**

Some of our leaders have finally got around to doing it today but the nation is miles down the road from where it was then. And, of course, behind all these moral issues is the whole creation/evolution debate. Sadly, there are many respected evangelicals who have compromised on evolution. They have a foot in both camps. They try to make the Bible fit in with Darwinism without realising that the basis for our moral values with respect to family and sexuality are grounded in the creation ordinances.

**What do you think of the church growth theory that has been so popular over the last 25 years?**

I believe that Christianity is about a change of heart, not simply a change of behaviour. The gospel confronts us with the fact of God, and the fact of our sin, and our need for redemption from judgment. Tragically, these things are being watered down today by many evangelicals. The problem is actually far deeper than most church growth theorists realise. It’s not just a matter of attracting people to a service that they feel comfortable with. I mean, an attractive service will undoubtedly bring some people to the church, but there’s got to be that heart engagement with God which is the Holy Spirit’s work. That’s the great matter.

So I don’t think you can organise church growth simply by tinkering around with the style of worship. Of course, that’s no excuse to hold a church service which is archaic and that deliberately avoids modern music. I love some of the modern music and I look forward to singing it. But I never forget that music does not equal conversion. Lots of people make the mistake today that if you just tinker with a few things around the edges and make everything modern and hi-tech, then people will come and be changed. But it doesn’t work that way.

**What sort of vision is needed by small churches if they are going to fulfil their calling to be faithful witnesses to God in this generation?**

We need to be in real contact with our local community. When I first came to the church in Guildford I realised that we had lost contact with the community around us. We did not engage with our neighbourhood. But if we are going to bring the gospel of God’s power to people we must be living among them. Think about Jesus’ incarnation; He came and He lived among us. He did not commute back to heaven every night. He lived with us.

So a church must try to engage with its local community. That’s the first thing. We need to share the gospel through practical involvement with the community, showing Christian love to our neighbourhood. If the local church actually helps the people who live in the immediate area then their hearts and minds are open to asking questions about the gospel. One of the interesting things about the New Testament is that when it talks about ordinary church members evangelising, like Colossians 4:5, 6 and 1 Peter 3:15, it usu-

## Visiting Melbourne?

Worship with us at

South Yarra Presbyterian

Church – 621 Punt Road

Every Sunday 10.30 am

& 5.30 pm.

Session Clerk: Mr Jack Adlawan

Phone: (03) 9808 7391

(Less than 3 kms from CBD)

ally speaks in terms of them answering, or being prepared to give an answer. It assumes that somehow people will be asking us questions because the way we live actually provokes our neighbours or friends to ask them. And that's the vision that I feel is absolutely necessary today. Again, that's not the way that the mega-churches think about their mission. They usually draw people from a very wide area and their emphasis is usually about putting on a big show. Obviously, I don't agree with that.

**What are some of the ways in which a small church can witness persuasively to our secular world?**

I believe that the secular world is a hard nut to crack but it is vulnerable at a number of points. The reality is that people are spiritual beings, regardless of their secular values, and so they do have a real hunger for spiritual reality. Therefore, when they meet Christians who really know the Lord and have a great sense of God about them, they sometimes become very curious about the nature of their faith.

It's also true that secularists are often afraid of what the future holds for themselves and their families in a world that is morally disintegrating. Again, the sense of uncertainty that grips them gives Christians a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate why they can be confident about the future in a world that seems to be falling apart. And a church can do that through practical things like running a good, wholesome and exciting young people's club. What do secularists have to offer at this point? Not much, as far as I can see. While there are a number of alternative youth programs on offer, people are given no assurance that their kids won't be offered drugs there or that leaders will hold a certain moral or spiritual point of view. However, if a church runs a really good Christian youth club that is based on strong biblical principles, then that is a great opportunity for witness.

I think Christians should also try to help out other local organisations in unselfish ways. My own wife was for many years involved with the local school. She actually became the chairwoman of governors there for a while. When it came time for her step down, another of our elders' wives took on the role and became deeply involved. So our local school had the benefit of some really fine leaders over a period of years. And I think that kind of thing makes people feel that the church really does want to do them good and actually cares about them. It's often in situations like that that we find opportunities to share the gospel with people.

Another point that is often forgotten is that there are lots of lonely people in our

*You can see that you have made an impact when people begin to trust the church.*



materialistic world, especially those who are not well off. Secular materialism is all very well for the rich, but if you are not so well-to-do it can be very difficult as you get older and feel that you are not wanted by people. Showing hospitality to such people or going out of your way to visit them is a wonderful opportunity to show Christian love. So I think there are many ways like that that a good church can really use to make contact with people.

**And it doesn't need to be big to do that?**

No, it doesn't. At one level it is as simple as caring for our neighbours. My wife looks after a blind lady who lives two or three doors down from us. The blind lady has started coming to church. We're not quite sure yet where she stands spiritually, but this is the kind of thing that Christians ought to do their best to be involved in.

**How do we know that a church is starting to make the right kind of impact in its area or its local community?**

You can see that you have made an impact when people begin to trust the church. I can think of times when non-Christians have come and said to me:

"John, you've been involved with us before; would you take our father's funeral?" I remember one occasion where a father died and we were asked, "the boys are obviously missing their dad terribly. Can you make a special effort to get them along to the children's club at church and make sure they feel at home?" They obviously had nowhere else to turn. These kinds of incidents have convinced me that if people are going to take the gospel seriously, then Christians need to have built a certain level of trust with them.

**Do you think it's very hard for newcomers today to visit a church? Do you have any suggestions as to how church members can treat newcomers?**

It can be very difficult for newcomers to feel comfortable in a church service. I heard about a seminar on evangelism where people were seated at desks. And at every desk they found a pound coin, and they wondered what it was all about. The person giving the lecture was trying to make the point about how difficult it is sometimes for newcomers to feel at home in a church. So he said, "Just so you can understand the kind of struggles that a non-Christian goes through when he goes into a church, I want you to take that pound at lunch time and go and place a bet at the local betting shop." Most of these Christians had never been in such an establishment and didn't have a clue about what to do. They were thinking, "Oh, my goodness, what will I do if one of my friends sees me in this place?" And he got them to do the exercise.

It was a good thing to do because it made these Christians realise how awkward it is for non-Christians to go into a church. They are scared their neighbours are going to be thinking, "maybe Harry has gone religious!" Visiting the betting shop was a valuable experience because it made the Christians understand the feelings and anxieties of those who come to church for the first time.

**John, what do you expect the members of your congregation to do when newcomers arrive?**

I like them to welcome newcomers with a friendly smile and I want them to be sensitive to their needs and feelings. I want them to talk to them, you know, some people tell you that they've gone to a church and "nobody talked to me". I think that's dreadful. I think that the first person who meets them needs to assess the kind of person they are. Do they need

**Caloundra - Qld**  
 Self contained 2 BR Units.  
 Ocean views, BBQ & heated pool,  
 close to shops and beaches.  
 Contact Marianne/Martin  
 07 5491 7155  
 or email [info@seafarerchase.net](mailto:info@seafarerchase.net)  
 Web [www.seafarerchase.net](http://www.seafarerchase.net)

someone to introduce them around or are they the sort of person who doesn't want to be made a fuss of? Some people want to be given a bit of space; they just want to come in and be a fly on the wall. So you really have to size up people and then treat them appropriately. That's not always easy.

The one thing we must avoid at all costs is giving the impression that we think that we are somehow better than they are. We are all sinners, saved by grace. That's the kind of atmosphere we need to have in our church. The other thing that is helpful at this point is to introduce them to other people in the church who may have similar interests or work in the same field as the visitor.

**Do we have any idea how people from radically different religious backgrounds are affected by the demonstration of Christian love?**

When Christians love other people from different cultures and religions it can have a profound effect. For instance, we can leave a significant impression on people from a Muslim background. Islam is quite a harsh religion and Muslim women can easily feel downtrodden by it. If Christians show Muslims respect, even at a very small level, it can have a great influence on them because as human beings they respond to love. Genuine Christian love touches them at a very deep level.

**Should small churches be discouraged if they can't devote many resources to the music ministry?**

No, they shouldn't be discouraged. Worship is not principally about music; it's about the heart; it's about love to God; and it's about obedience and submission to the Lord. I've already mentioned that I love music, but music itself is not worship. Jesus warns us that "these people draw near to me with their lips but their hearts are far from me". I'm sure that the Lord would be more pleased with a congregation that has great difficulty with an old piano but whose hearts are on fire for Him than the best electric guitars and drums that money can buy but with no genuine surrender. You can get swept away in the emotion of modern music when it's not matched with a real heart love for God. I really don't think small churches should be worried if they have relatively limited musical resources.

**How important is the ministry of hospitality in the outreach of the church?**

I think it is very important because it does two things. First, it says to the Lord, "Lord, I want you to be in my home. I'm not just interested in turning up to church on Sundays. I want to use my life for you". Hospitality is a way that I can open up a bit more of my life to God. Then, second, it's important because it makes people realise that you're interested in them. You're not just interested in a man sitting on a pew on Sunday; you're actually interested in friendship, in sharing something of your life.

**You've spoken about the importance of a sense of "family" in a church. What role can older people have in creating such an atmosphere in a congregation?**

I think some of the most valuable roles that are played in the church are played by the older people. If they are still active and healthy there are a variety of things that they can do that can directly assist the outreach and pastoral care offered by the church. You know, very often retired folk can open up their homes to students or others who are living away from their

families. That is a tremendous thing. Often retired people have more time to do these sorts of things than others. I have certainly seen retired people involved in very good follow-up work. They have invited people around who have recently become Christians and simply been there for them. When newer Christians have sometimes had problems or whatever, they have been there for them. I have had older people in our church who have taken initiatives in this regard and said, "if you want to pick up the phone and talk to us, if you want to share with us the struggles that you are going through, we will be glad to listen and to pray with you". When people who have retired from the workforce do this sort of thing they play a vital role.

Again, some older people can play a strategic role in the church through prayer. I can't emphasise this enough. Often they may not be well enough to get around and be involved in more physically demanding ministry, but if they are mature Christians they can be powerful intercessors behind the scenes. This is an essential ministry. They may not be able to do much entertaining or show hospitality because their health is not good enough, but they can still pray. Further, they can have a real pastoral ministry over the phone. They can show they care for people by ringing them up and, without prying, finding out how to pray for others in ways that will help face their demands and challenges.

ap

***Worship is not principally about music. Small churches should not be worried if they have relatively limited musical resources.***



**A tradition of Christian care and concern**

Our professional staff are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to assist you during this difficult time in your life. It's simple – we listen to your needs and guide you through.

- Compassion & understanding
- 100% Australian owned & operated
- Reasonable fees
- All suburbs

**Baulkham Hills**  
4D Seven Hills Road P 9686 3055

**Seven Hills**  
1/69 Powers Road P 9838 7711

**Kellyville**  
P 8883 4562

 **Hills Family Funerals**

 **24 Hour Care Line**  
**9838 7711**  
Richard Spiteri personally

# Satan's schemes

*The Bible warns what harms the church. It's not lack of size.*

One of the features of church growth theory over the last few decades has been its preoccupation with the size of the local church. In our increasingly urban world, the gurus of church growth have exhorted us to renounce "smallness" in favour of "bigness". One of them has trumpeted "bigness" as the solution to effective world evangelisation. "Big buildings, big car dealers, big supermarkets, big shopping centres are the norm ... People are conditioned to think big in the city ... we cannot afford to keep our churches small... the size of the modern city demands that we think big."

However, if "smallness" is the underlying difficulty, one would expect to find numerous references in the New Testament to it and also, presumably, some strategies to remedy the problem. But when we search for such information, the evidence is by no means easy to find. In fact, it's like looking for a needle in a haystack because none of the New Testament writers make the point that larger numbers of people in church make a congregation more useful to Christ. So if smallness in itself is not a church's problem, what is?

In a word, the Bible says that the problems of the church are always spiritual and largely arise from the unrelenting warfare in which we find ourselves. It is sad that many Christians today don't see it.

Having been raised in a materialistic and secular culture, many of us have difficulty in accepting the reality of Satan and the existence of demonic powers. Nevertheless, the apostles teach that just as Satan attacked Jesus in the wilderness as He readied himself for the task of redemption, so Satan also targets the church.

This should not surprise us because the church represents Christ in bringing salvation to the world and by providing an environment in which believers can experience spiritual transformation. As Paul says, the church is "the pillar and foundation of the truth" whose purpose is to make known "the manifold wisdom of God" to all the nations and the heavenly powers (1 Tim.



**Peter  
Hastie**

3:15; Eph. 3:10; Mt 28:19). Since the church has such a strategic role, the devil's interest in destroying it is perfectly understandable.

The question is: how does he go about his task? Paul's letters provide us with some insight. In writing to the Ephesians, he counsels them about "the devil's schemes" (6:11). The term *schemes* is used elsewhere in the letter in a context which

***Revelation reminds us that life for the church is war. It's a war Satan has begun in heaven and continues upon the earth.***

suggests cunning and deceitfulness (4:14). Used here in connection with Satan, it implies that Satan does not always launch frontal assaults but specialises in less obvious subversive activities. The use of *schemes* in the plural suggests that Satan's attacks may be ongoing and take a variety of forms. Some may be overt, such as persecution, whereas others may be less obvious. Donald Grey Barnhouse once commented that one of Satan's most successful ruses was to get his agents past Presbytery ordination committees so that he gained control of pulpits across the nation.

While Paul has much to say about Satan's strategy against the church, it's in the book of Revelation that we find the most direct references to his schemes and tactics. One of the characteristics of Revelation is the number of times that Satan and his supernatural forces are mentioned in the book. Indeed, there are more references to Satan and his work in Revelation than anywhere else in the New Testament. Furthermore, the references are spread uniformly throughout Revelation and cover every dimension of the underworld from direct attacks

against the church to the "deep things of Satan" (2:24).

We are fortunate to have this information because as Barnhouse reminds us in *The Invisible War*, one of Satan's cleverest strategies is to keep us in ignorance of his being and the fraudulent nature of his claims. Thus, the book of Revelation is of real help because it gives us a comprehensive account of the many ways in which the devil tries to destroy the church.

Most importantly, Revelation reminds us that life for the church is war. It's a war that Satan has begun in heaven and which he continues upon the earth (12:7, 17). His aim is to destroy the church and devour it (12:4, 17). He's a specialist in deception and his malevolence know no bounds. He will stoop to any means to achieve his ends (12:9, 10, 12).

Whether Christians actually believe this is a moot point. During a war a nation takes its security seriously; it prepares for possible attacks. But do believers today think that Satan is a more deadly enemy than terrorists, or realise that he can be covertly at work in our denominations, theological colleges, and local churches? This is the question that the book of Revelation forces us to answer.

Perhaps the most helpful insights that we gain into Satan's tactics against the church are found in the Letters to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3). These seven churches represent the universal church. In this sense, they are an invaluable guide in demonstrating how Satan prosecutes his war against the church in every age.

Interestingly, when we compare these letters with the rest of Revelation, we find nothing in them that explicitly indicates persecution from the Roman authorities. On the contrary, the trials of Christians are more directly linked to sinister forces such as Satan and hostile Jews (2:9-10, 13). Further, John lays the blame for the churches' troubles on perhaps less obvious causes such as false apostles, heresy, false prophecy as well as idolatry and immorality (2:2, 14, 20).

All these threats are spiritual in nature and are a sign of the devil's handiwork. Indeed, the frequency in these letters of

such expressions as “Satan”, “the devil”, “false apostles”, “Satan’s throne”, “idols”, “Jezebel”, “sexual immorality”, and the “deep things of Satan” is sufficient to alert us that the major danger facing churches is not their “smallness” but Satan’s schemes.

So what are some of these schemes? Let me mention a few. The first and most obvious tactic that Satan uses against believers is to infiltrate false teachers into the church. The reason for this should be obvious. Satan knows that we are saved and sanctified through our knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 2:25; Tit. 1:1). Since this is so, Satan also knows that if he can compromise the ministry of the word, he has struck a major blow against the church.

We should not be surprised at this phenomenon. I once had a conversation with an older minister who confided to me that he knew he was an unbeliever at the time of his ordination. In fact, he told me that he did not believe in the deity of Jesus and had misled the Presbytery when they had questioned him about the matter. He served for more than 25 years in several Australian states before he was led to Christ by a stranger on an aircraft. God had mercy on this man, but what of the congregations which he had deceived week after week until his conversion? In more recent times, Dr Peter Cameron, who was found guilty of heresy by the Presbytery of Sydney, confided to a reporter from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, who later published the statement, that he had knowingly entered the Presbyterian ministry as a “double agent”.

It is interesting to note that in at least half of the churches mentioned by John, false teachers and a watered-down gospel constituted a problem. Just how prevalent these issues are today is anyone’s guess, but it highlights the need for extreme vigilance in our presbyteries, theological colleges and churches. The presence of false teachers among us is utterly destructive of our spiritual life and sense of mission.

Further, John highlights the fact that false teaching comes in many forms. He refers to the “doctrine of the Nicolaitans”, the “teaching of Balaam” and the false “prophecies of Jezebel” (2:14, 15, 20). Although it is not explicitly stated, I think we can presume that there was something seriously wrong with the teaching in Sardis (3:1-6) and Laodicea (3:14-21) as well because in neither church was there any real sense of spiritual life. All this serves to warn us that Satan, who is the

arch-deceiver (12:9), targets the pulpits and teaching programs of our churches. Church leaders must always be alert to this possibility and guard the gospel.

Satan’s second tactic is to stir up violent opposition to the church so that Christians become afraid to witness and fall into silence. In the first century there seems to have been extreme hostility to the churches in Smyrna and Pergamum that was stirred up to a large extent by the Jews (2:8-17). The frightening nature of this threat is expressed in phrases such as, “the devil is about to throw some of you



***Another tactic is the way in which Satan encourages the appointment of “people-pleasers” into church pulpits.***

into prison”, “tribulation”, “testing”, and “be faithful unto death” (2:10). The severity of the persecution becomes clear when we read that “Antipas, my faithful witness, was killed” (2:13). This opposition serves as a reminder to us that suffering, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, “is the badge of a true Christian”.

But not all suffering is of a physical nature. Satan realises that sometimes he can inflict more pain upon the church through the shame of slander than through physical threats (2:9). Slander was the preferred weapon used by the earliest enemies of Christianity. They spread rumours that Christians were cannibals because they ate “the body of Christ” at the Lord’s Supper. They accused them of debauchery because they shared in a common meal that was known as the “Love Feast”. When Christians refused to acknowledge the divinity of Caesar, they were vilified as traitors and atheists. Persecution is nothing new.

Today, the devil attempts to silence the church in many places through threats of violence. The fact that the vast majority of Iraqi Christians have fled their country in recent times is a reminder that Satan will do whatever he can to eliminate Christian witness in a culture. The various forms of anti-vilification and anti-conversion laws in many democracies today are a further attempt to use the sanction of official force to stifle Christian comment and wit-

ness. The source of the trouble, however, is ultimately Satanic.

Another tactic employed by Satan to discredit the church is to lure believers into scandals, especially involving sexual immorality (2:14, 15, 20, 22). Whether Christians realise it or not, Satan actually sets traps which are designed to catch them in situations of moral compromise. Once these actions become known, the person is disgraced and the church maligned. When a church leader is involved in immorality, Paul describes the resulting shame as falling into the “devil’s trap” (1 Tim. 3:7). Satan knows full well that if he can bring discredit upon a church leader, then outsiders will be disinclined to hear the gospel.

This explains why it’s so important that pastors, elders, and ministry leaders have a blameless reputation both within and beyond the church. The consequences of serious moral failure on their part blunt the ability of the church to reach its community with the gospel. The recent fall of Ted Haggard in the United States illustrates the damage that can be done when prominent Christians are lured into infidelity. Satan knows this and specialises in “setting traps” for those with pastoral responsibility.

The last tactic that I want to explore is the way in which Satan encourages the appointment of “people-pleasers” into church pulpits. It seems apparent from the complacency and lifelessness in the churches of Sardis (3:1-6) and Laodicea (3:14-22), that the ministry of Christ’s “sharp two-edged sword” (1:16) had been blunted. The preaching was powerless. Why? We can only speculate about what might have been happening, but the level of self-satisfaction in the church suggests that the pastors had capitulated to a “give-people-what-they-want” style of ministry that left them comfortable in their materialism and self-love. It seems that both these churches had lapped up the witty reassurances, small talk and soothing words of the audience-driven preachers and had forgotten that they needed a more confronting style of preaching that included the themes of sin, righteousness and judgment.

The lesson of The Letters to the Seven Churches in Revelation is plain: the size of a congregation should not be its chief concern; of far more importance is its awareness of the tactics Satan can employ against it.

Peter Hastie is issues editor of AP.



# Rushing to eternity

*The meaning of time is outside time.*

In Psalm 90 Moses considered the nature of God: He is from everlasting to everlasting. To God, a thousand years are like a watch in the night. We human beings, however, are compared to grass which grows up and flourishes in the morning, but is cut down and withers in the evening. Even if we survive 80 years, it is soon cut off and we fly away.

If these things are true – and they obviously are – it is surely strange that we are so reluctant to contemplate what is both self-evident and of such crucial importance to us all. It ever was thus, as Blaise Pascal pointed out: “Since men are unable to cure death, misery, and ignorance, they imagine they can find happiness by not thinking about such things.”

Unlike many of us, Moses faced the truth of God’s eternity and our transience, and prayed: “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Ps.90:12).

The 19th century Anglican minister and hymn writer Henry Twells wrote a poem that all of us older ones can relate to:

*When as a child I laughed and wept,  
Time crept.  
When as a youth I waxed more bold,  
Time strolled.  
When I became a full-grown man,  
Time ran.  
When older still I daily grew,  
Time flew.  
Soon I shall find, in passing on,  
Time gone.  
O Christ! Wilt Thou have saved me  
then?  
Amen.*

Time seems to accelerate as we get older, like a runaway vehicle heading downhill.

As the year 1999 rolled into 2000, the Sydney Harbour bridge was emblazoned with the word “Eternity”. It was a surprising way for an avowedly secular nation to celebrate the passing of time. Humanly speaking, it was meant to be a tribute to Arthur Stace – known as Mr Eternity – who was converted from a



**Peter Barnes**

life of alcoholism and petty crime in 1930. In 1932 Stace heard John Ridley preach on Isaiah 57:15 (“Thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity”).

**Time is short.  
Eternity is long. It is only reasonable that this short life be lived in the light of eternity.**

CHARLES SPURGEON

Ridley cried out: “Eternity! Eternity! I wish I could sound or shout that word to everyone in the streets of Sydney. Eternity! You have to meet it. Where will you spend eternity?” Stace could hardly write his own name yet he went out into the street and wrote

“eternity” on the footpath in a beautiful copperplate script. Later, he made the first “e” into a capital to thwart a man who had tried to deface the word by placing an “m” in front of it, thus turning it into “meter-nity”.

For the next 33 years, Stace continued to write “Eternity” on the streets of Sydney. It is a fitting message to a culture immersed in the here and now, and reluctant to ponder the issues of life and death, of time and eternity.

Others could put this message in a more elegant framework. Henry Francis Lyte wrote:

*Frail as summer’s flower we flourish;  
Blows the wind and it is gone;  
But, while mortals rise and perish,  
God endures unchanging on.*

Isaac Watts spoke of time as “like an ever-rolling stream” which “bears all its sons away”. The Psalmist says that we are dust, and our days like grass, or like a flower of the field that flourishes for a brief time until the wind blows it away (Psalm 103:14-16).

Many of Jesus’ parables deal with the

passing of time and the need to be prepared for eternity. The rich fool (Luke 12) and the five foolish virgins (Matt. 25), for example, were unprepared for death or the coming of the King.

How should we then live? We should live in time as those who know that time is passing quickly. The meaning of time is outside time – in eternity. Charles Spurgeon put it as succinctly as anyone: “Time is short. Eternity is long. It is only reasonable that this short life be lived in the light of eternity.” This means that as sinners living in time we need to cast ourselves on the mercy of Him who is the Lord of eternity, and has the power to grant everlasting life.

*Peter Barnes is minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, Sydney.*

**PresData Services Web Hosting**

**Did you know?**

Mike Wharton (PresData Services) is offering Australian PCA Churches website and email hosting for \$135.00 (plus GST) per year?

- 100mb Storage
- 20 email accounts
- unlimited redirects
- 10GB Bandwidth per month
- 24x7 FTP access

You can have your site hosted and manage the site yourself using direct FTP access. You create your site - you control the site.

Website development is also available.. ask for a quote.

For more information contact:

Mike Wharton  
Phone: (03) 9580 5940  
Email: [mwharton@pcvic.org.au](mailto:mwharton@pcvic.org.au)



# *Instruction manual*

***20 daily Bible studies  
in Matthew 13-17***

**T**he church today can easily fall into the trap of adopting the world's methods to solve its problems. Already we are reading far too many books on marketing as a means of addressing the drift in our society away from the Church. A far better, more reliable, and more effective source of information and encouragement is the Gospel record.

*This month we will work through five chapters of Matthew's Gospel, chapters that will be a good manual on church growth. Jesus will teach us in parables about what the Kingdom of Heaven is like; He will show Himself to be God's True King; He will challenge us to be kingdom-oriented, wholly committed kingdom people; He will encourage us to be patient and persevering while at the same time to expect to see real growth. He will show us what authentic faith looks like, and what the fake version looks like; He will give us a firm promise about the future of His church. We don't need manuals on marketing – we need directions on discipleship, on what it means to walk in the steps of the One Who said, "I will build my church (on the confession that I am the Promised Messiah, the Son of the Living God) and the gates of hell will neither overcome it nor prevail against it."*

**Bruce Christian ▶**

**DAY 1**

*The dirt on unbelief*

**THE PASSAGE** MATTHEW 13:1-9, 18-23

**THE POINT** The “Parable of the Sower” is possibly the best known of all the parables, providing a context for Jesus to explain why He used this teaching method, and why man’s reaction to spiritual truth varies so much. It is a great encouragement to us, both as believers in Christ, and as people called to win others for Christ. Its standing as the paradigm parable is borne out by the fact that it is one of the few for which Jesus gives a detailed explanation.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- The boat-pulpit was an effective mass-communication tool for Jesus because of the way sound carries across water (1-2).
- The four different responses to the Gospel outlined in this

parable (3-9, 19-23) have been experienced in the Church’s application of the Great Commission (28:18-20) for 2000 years. It is reassuring to see that Jesus foretold this outcome, and so be encouraged to press on even in the face of apparent failure!

- That Jesus declares that there is good, responsive/productive soil out there should greatly encourage us in our witness today.
- Soils 2 and 3 are a strong warning against would-be followers of Jesus thinking they can play with superficiality or worldliness.

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Are we ultimately accountable for the kind of soil we are?

**DAY 2**

*Unseeing eyes, unhearing ears*

**THE PASSAGE** MATTHEW 13:10-17

**THE POINT** These are strong words of Jesus, and quite unpalatable to the thinking of modern man because they attack his feeling of self-sufficiency and his commitment to scientific logic that has no room for a sovereign God Who reveals Himself in propositions.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- This is one of many examples of Jesus’ frank statements about predestination – God’s electing grace and His sovereignty in man’s salvation (cf 11:25-27; John 6:37, 44, 65; 10:25-30) (11).
- By quoting Isaiah 6:9-10, Jesus shows that His simple, down to earth, easy to understand parables, rather than enabling the natural man to come to faith by his own volition, actually only

serve to remove from him the excuse that the way of salvation is too hard to grasp. In other words, the parables cannot heal spiritual blindness, but their simplicity does condemn it (10-15).

- The only key that can unlock the mystery of God’s revelation in the OT is Jesus; we are privileged indeed to know Him (16-17)!

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- How does Jesus’ use of parables help us to see the need to explain the Gospel as simply and clearly as possible to unbelievers?
- How does Jesus’ answer to the disciples help us to see that we can never lead someone to faith in Christ by logical argument?

**DAY 3**

*Weed better be careful!*

**THE PASSAGE** MATTHEW 13:24-30, 36-43

**THE POINT** There is a tendency today, even among Christians who claim to be evangelical, to ignore what the Bible – and especially Jesus – says about hell. This parable, particularly in the light of Jesus’ explanation, leaves us in no doubt as to the eternal fate of those who reject God’s saving Word, even as it also warns us against being too certain of God’s final judgement as to who they are!

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Satan is actively at work producing “disciples” who look as much like the real thing as possible (cf 2 Corinthians 11:13-15). The word for devil (39) is “diabolos” = “deceiver”. So his work is most effective when the Church is lulled into think-

ing all is well, sleeping soundly when it should be awake (cf 1 Peter 5:8)!

- God is the final Judge as to who are truly His; and He does judge.

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Opinions are divided as to whether this parable has any bearing on Church discipline. Some take Jesus’ words, “The field is the world” (38, ie not “the Church”) to indicate that Jesus is not warning us here against over-zealous discipline. But if it is hard to distinguish wheat from weeds in the world generally, how is it any easier to do it with any certainty in the Church?
- What is the real danger of over-zealous Church discipline (29)?

**DAY 4**

*Despise not the day of small things*

**THE PASSAGE** MATTHEW 13:31-35

**THE POINT** Because the only yardstick the world has to measure success is quantitative, the Church too readily adopts the same thinking (cf 1 Chronicles 21:1). The problem is magnified today because the “success” also has to be immediate. The Church’s drive for instant results in the popularity stakes is causing it to do things that are not only neither God-glorifying nor durable, but that make us impatient and “clever” instead of learning to wait on God.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Jesus’ deliberate use of the mustard seed/yeast images should encourage us to be more patient (and therefore prayerful) as we see God working out His purposes for His Kingdom, His

Church, in the world; but it should also encourage us to expect growth, no matter how gradual/unspectacular it is in the world’s eyes.

- The picture of the mustard tree dominating the domestic garden points to the Church being prominent in the local community as a source of life, vitality, even spice, in human society (cf 5:13).
- The picture of the birds nesting in the branches points to our responsibility to show Christ’s love/care even to unbelievers.
- The picture of the yeast points to our need to infiltrate society.

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Does the Church today truly reflect the kingdom of heaven?

**DAY 5**

*Old truths, new insights*

**THE PASSAGE**

**MATTHEW 13:44-52**

**THE POINT** Nothing has ever been more important than the kingdom of God.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Jesus' intention in each parable is clear and simple; we ought not be concerned with the ethics of other parts of the story that provide a framework for the main point(s). Like the kingdom of heaven, the treasure was so important when discovered that the man was prepared to sacrifice everything else for it. The ethics of his secrecy so as not to risk missing out is not before us (44).
- In the other pearl of a parable Jesus wants to drive home the point, so relevant to us in the western Church today (45-46).

- The parable of the net draws together all Jesus' teaching in this chapter: there will be a Day of Reckoning when those who have been indifferent, or superficial, or compromising, or two-faced, or half-hearted about following Him will be separated for ever from those who have made it their No. 1 priority and so have seen God patiently working in and through their lives (47-50).
- All of this is already embedded in the Mosaic Law (51-52).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Where does God's kingdom rate in your lifestyle? How is this reflected in the way you spend your time? ... energy? ... money? ... or the use you make of your God-given abilities? (cf 6:24-34)

**DAY 6**

*More than a carpenter?*

**THE PASSAGE**

**MATTHEW 13:53-58**

**THE POINT** The relationship between faith and miracles is enigmatic. Some argue that miracles are wholly dependent on man's faith, citing many instances like Matthew 9:22, 29; Mark 10:52; Luke 7:50; etc. However, in Luke 7:12-16, neither the boy nor his mother showed any faith prior to Jesus' raising him from the dead, and the story of Job shows us that great faith does not guarantee miraculous healing – quite the opposite! Moreover: the miracles were intended to prove Jesus' true identity as God (John 10:25, 38; 14:11; 20:30-31) and therefore could not be rendered powerless simply by unfaith on our part; and they are also the means by which God shows His grace to helpless, undeserving sinners who are unable/unwilling in

themselves to turn to Him in any case. Jesus' autonomous decision not to do many miracles in His hometown was in line with the principles He taught in Matthew 7:6 and 10:14 rather than their lack of faith limiting His power.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- The people who'd seen Jesus grow up and who knew His family had become too accustomed to His humanity to recognise His true divinity; worldly thinking had blinded their spiritual eyes.

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Do we let familiarity and human wisdom stop us from recognising in each other the spiritual gifts God has given us to share?

**DAY 7**

*Her odious sins*

**THE PASSAGE**

**MATTHEW 14:1-12**

**THE POINT** Herodias was both the niece of Herod Antipas (the daughter of his half-brother Aristobulus) and his sister-in-law (the wife of his half-brother Philip). So Herod's seduction of her was trebly (and terribly!) wicked since it also involved the rejection of his own wife. Because the courageous, godly John the Baptist was unafraid to point this out to Antipas openly, the tetrarch had put him in the dungeon. But Herod's conscience at least held him in awe of the Baptist, readily accepting that God had given him certain miraculous powers. Herodias and her lovely daughter (Salome) were not so endowed in the scruple department, their method of getting John off the stage altogether being as sick as it is legendary.

The Son of God had come to a very evil world.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Like his father, Herod the Great, who slaughtered the children in Bethlehem in the hope of killing the Messiah (2:16-18), Herod Antipas was hated by the Jews. Jesus had no time for him either, refusing to answer his questions at His trial (Luke 23:8-9).
- Like the One Whose coming he heralded, John suffered a demeaning, ignominious death; but he was allowed a decent burial by the faithful band of followers. Jesus was also moved (cf 13).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- What is it costing you to remain faithful to Jesus and His truth?

**DAY 8**

*"Bring them here to me"*

**THE PASSAGE**

**MATTHEW 14:13-21**

**THE POINT** That all four gospels record two instances of feeding miracles emphasises their importance in understanding Who Jesus is.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- In spite of His own heavy heart (because of what had happened to John), and His desire for solitude, Jesus still felt compassion for others – for the lost sheep of Israel (13-14, cf Mark 6:34).
- The disciples shared Jesus' concern for the people, but felt helpless to provide the necessary resources. We can identify with them as we see the plight of so many refugees today (15, 17).
- Jesus' challenge to the disciples to learn to trust God to sup-

ply their need (cf 6:26-27) was a good teaching opportunity – He already knew exactly what He intended to do (16; cf John 6:5-6).

- Instead of ignoring the disciples' ridiculously meagre resources Jesus took them and multiplied them to meet the need – and more.
- The feeding of the multitude is a creation miracle that is clearly intended to leave us in no doubt at all that Jesus is God. The whole Biblical record of God's revelation of Himself as Creator and Provider of all things leads to this conclusion. To try to explain it away in any other way is to miss the whole point.

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- What different things do you learn about Jesus from this event?

**DAY 9**

*God's world – He rules*

**THE PASSAGE**

**MATTHEW 14:22-36**

**THE POINT** Archimedes' Principle is right as far as it goes, but it is only one side of the story; the other side is God. That Jesus as Son of God could walk on water, might surprise Archimedes, the disciples and us, but it shows that God is not bound by man's science.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Jesus again needed time alone in prayer with His Father (cf 13) so He made the disciples go away, probably reluctantly (22-23).
- John tells us (6:19) the boat was 5-6 km from shore when Jesus came to them just before dawn, which means the storm must have driven them off-course south where the lake gets wider (24-25).
- After a 9-hour, strenuous, life-and-death struggle the disci-

ples were in no fit state for calm assessment of what they saw (26)!

- Jesus incorporated His simple, divine password, "I AM", into His words of reassurance (cf Ex. 3:14, John 8:58; NIV: "It is I" – 27).
- Peter's faith and trust were intact while ever his mind was taken up by the undeniable evidence – staring him in the face – of Jesus' divine nature; but they deserted him as soon as he reverted to a strictly human-scientific perspective that excludes God (28-30).
- Jesus is God: He rules every aspect of the world He made (31-36).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- How many proofs that Jesus is truly God can you identify here?

**DAY 10**

*Man looks on the outside...*

**THE PASSAGE**

**MATTHEW 15:1-9**

**THE POINT** One of the challenges facing the Church in every age, and no less in our own day, is to distinguish between good order and bad tradition. The discipline of good order is helpful for the smooth running of the Church so that people are not left confused and time and energy wasted; bad tradition occurs when good order becomes an end in itself and its original purpose is lost sight of. God gave Moses meaningful laws so there would be good order; but He also knew that fallen man would soon abuse the laws by turning them into unhelpful, in fact quite dangerous, traditions. It is this that Isaiah warned against (29:13), a warning that the Church of Jesus' day failed to grasp or heed. Bad traditions can be recognised by

their inconsistency, hypocrisy and self-serving.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Jesus will explain tomorrow why the Pharisees' hand-washing ritual missed the whole point of the Levitical purification laws.
- Jesus exposed their hypocrisy by pointing out glaring inconsistencies, and even spiritual wickedness, in their other practices.

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Do you have safeguards in place to prevent any of your regular devotional/worship practices from becoming unhelpful/God-dishonouring traditions? Who helps you monitor this? When?

**DAY 11**

*...but God looks on the heart*

**THE PASSAGE**

**MATTHEW 15:10-20**

**THE POINT** God has built into the design of our bodies a wonderful purification system that extracts from the food we eat all that is useful to the body's functioning and automatically rejects as waste all that is harmful. Our problem is not with the physical processes of our digestive-waste plant: the Designer has all that in hand. No, our real problem of spiritual uncleanness originates in the heart (cf Jeremiah 17:9). The ceremonial washing laws throughout Leviticus were only ever meant to symbolise what must happen at a spiritual level if sinful man approaches a holy God. Unless the heart problem is dealt with, all the hand washing in the world is useless. This is why Leviticus is looking forward to Jesus' cleansing blood, as

the writer to the Hebrews points out (eg 10:19-22). To equate the outward symbol with the inner spiritual work is to miss the whole point of what God is doing!

**THE PARTICULARS**

- It is no surprise the Pharisees were upset: Jesus dismantled the whole fabric of their false religion based on outward show, even using their own Scriptures to do it! Dead, blind ritual had no place among the life-giving plants of God's garden (12-14).
- Evil speech/thought proves how unholy my heart really is; if I am to have fellowship with a holy God, I need more than a hand wash, I need a whole new/clean heart (15-20; cf Ezek. 36:26)!

**DAY 12**

*Dogged faith*

**THE PASSAGE**

**MATTHEW 15:21-28**

**THE POINT** This beautiful story leaves us in no doubt as to the true nature of God's grace and how it extends to all without distinction.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Jesus' withdrawal to Gentile territory (21) was probably to get some relief from the pressure of having to deal with (i) humble Jewish people who wanted to crown Him as Messiah but who had no understanding that the crown He was to wear would be made of thorns; (ii) Jewish leaders who saw Him as an impostor and wanted to kill Him; and possibly, (iii) Herod's scheming.
- The Gentile Canaanite woman had a better understanding of

Jesus' true identity than many Jews: she called Him "Lord" (the word used in the Greek OT to translate "Yahweh") and "Son of David" (ie "Messiah"); she knew He had God's power to cast out demons; and she came with a submissive, repentant heart (22).

- Jesus, presumably deliberately, set up the situation that gave the woman opportunity to prove to onlookers the "great" faith He knew she had. (This contrasts with some other healings where He required no expression of faith on the part of the healed!)
- The woman thoroughly understood the nature of grace (27)!

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Do you persist in prayer when you feel God is not listening?

**DAY 13**

*Slow learners*

**THE PASSAGE**

**MATTHEW 15:29-39**

**THE POINT** Mark tells us (7:31) that these miraculous works of Jesus were done in the Decapolis, the region SE of Lake Galilee which had come completely under pagan influence. What He'd done among the Jews (14:13ff) He is now prepared to repeat among the Gentiles, showing Himself to be the promised Messiah for all people.

**THE PARTICULARS**

• Even among “foreigners”, Jesus’ fame spread quickly, and many benefited from His Messianic ministry. Their response contrasts with that of His own people (13:53ff) – they “praised the God of Israel” (29-31; cf Paul citing Isaiah 65:1,2 in Romans 10:20,21).

• When we reflect on our own repeated failures to keep trusting Jesus in spite of many experiences of His power to meet all our needs, we ought not be amazed at the disciples’ apparent failure to have learned from the previous feeding of the 5,000 (32-33). After all, they were still struggling with Jesus’ true identity!

• The two separate feedings recorded by both Matthew and Mark clearly could not have been confused accounts of the same event – the settings and details are too diverse, and the disciples could hardly have forgotten how many there were (and cf 16:8-12)!

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

• Are you entrusting all your meagre resources to Jesus’ power?

**DAY 14**

*“Where’s the tap?”*

**THE PASSAGE**

**MATTHEW 16:1-4**

**THE POINT** An incredibly dumb question on my part at a picnic many years ago has led to a family expression used to point out any failure to see the obvious: “Where’s the tap?” Jesus had performed an unknown number of miraculous signs among the Jews and beyond – of which Matthew has recorded more than 17 public instances up to this point – and the Jewish leaders ask Him for proof of His claimed Messiahship! There was no excuse for such unbelief (cf 11:1-6). There is none so blind as those who don’t want to see.

**THE PARTICULARS**

• The old adage, “Red at night, shepherds’ delight; red in the morning, shepherds’ warning” has been a fairly reliable

weather forecasters’ guide for a long, long time. Our pride in our ability to predict the weather only heightens our condemnation for our inability to see God at work in His world, especially in Jesus.

• Jesus had already explained what the sign of Jonah would be (12:39-42). The failure of the Jewish leaders to recognise Jesus’ identity even after the resurrection is unforgivable in the light of what they had to do to cover it up (see 27:62-66; 28:11-15).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

• How does this passage help us to answer people who say that they would believe in God if only He would give some concrete proof that He exists? What would constitute concrete proof?

**DAY 15**

*Not by bread alone*

**THE PASSAGE**

**MATTHEW 16:5-12**

**THE POINT** In our fallen nature we are more inclined to think about, and be concerned for, our physical well-being than our spiritual well-being. So, when Jesus mentioned the yeast of the Pharisees, the disciples’ minds automatically turned to bread. Had the Master noticed their failure to bring enough supplies, and so was He warning them against becoming indebted to these hostile Jewish leaders by asking them for some? Was He saying their mission could in some way be compromised at this point by eating with them? It was all too cryptic and confusing for these poor, earth-bound minds to grapple with – but it gives Jesus the opportunity to make two important points concerning Kingdom thinking.

**THE PARTICULARS**

• The disciples needed yet another reminder of Jesus’ Kingdom principle set before them earlier in the Sermon on the Mount concerning anxiety over physical needs like food (7:25, 26, 33). The 2 feedings of the multitudes should surely have been more than sufficient proof of the validity of that teaching (8-11a)!

• The disciples needed to be warned (as we do) against becoming like the Pharisees by letting sinful pride and worldly thinking eat into their whole lives and destroy their integrity (11b-12).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

• How does Pharisaical thinking infect the Church today?

**DAY 16**

*The Church’s one foundation*

**THE PASSAGE**

**MATTHEW 16:13-20**

**THE POINT** An inspired declaration: the foundation for Christ’s Church.

**THE PARTICULARS**

• The title “Son of Man” is only ever used in the Gospels by Jesus to describe Himself. The Jews would have seen it primarily as referring to the coming figure of Daniel 7:13, and the disciples would have become accustomed to Jesus’ claim to it (13).

• The current rumours identifying Jesus with departed heroes of faith could have implied either likeness in charisma/mission, or some divinely inspired “resurrection” (14; cf 14:2; Malachi 4:5).

• Peter’s (correct) recognition of Jesus as the Messiah could

only have been divinely inspired — as also with us (16-17, cf 11:27).

• In a play on Peter’s name (Petros, “Rocky”) Jesus defines the true foundation of His Church: confessing Him as the Messiah (18a).

• All Satan’s influence/power will never be able, either to overcome Christ’s Church, or to withstand its advance in rescuing us from Satan’s hold (the Greek allows both meanings) (18b).

• Christ calls His Church to maintain true doctrine and exercise right discipline on His behalf among His redeemed people (19).

• Jesus resisted the spread of wrong ideas about His identity (20).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

• Is the Church today truly fulfilling all Christ called it to be?

**DAY 17**

*Two ways to think*

**THE PASSAGE**

**MATTHEW 16:21-28**

**THE POINT** Peter's bold declaration at Caesarea-Philippi precipitated his Master's final departure on the way to Jerusalem. It was time to explain to His disciples just what this was all about, what it would cost (both Him and them), and what the outcome would be.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Jesus was never in doubt about the ultimate cost of submission to His Father's will: "obedience to death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8); nor about who would do this (cf 27:24-25); nor about what the glorious result would be on day three (21)!
- Peter is a good example of the tension we feel between the

joy of recognising the Holy Spirit's fruit in us, and the discomfort of seeing the remaining influence of our fallen nature; the time gap between vs 17 and vs 23 is probably embarrassingly short!

- Man has no place for hardship and suffering in his "ideal" world; but, as followers of Jesus we need to learn to think again. The path to heaven is the path our Saviour trod: putting aside self-interest and this world's glory, and living only for Him (24-26).
- The Lamb who will reign is the One who was slain (Rev. 5:12); in seeing Him die they saw Him coming in His kingdom (27-28).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- How do you respond to Paul's challenge in Colossians 3:1-4?

**DAY 18**

*Two ways to go*

**THE PASSAGE**

**MATTHEW 17:1-13**

**THE POINT** Jesus, the Son of God was born without sin, and had lived a life of absolute obedience to the Father's will; the Second Adam had not failed as the first Adam did! Now, two ways lay before Him: to return to His former glory, the result of a sinless life; or freely to choose death, to take the place of sinners as their substitute. What happened on the mountain proved the validity of the first option (1-13); what happened when they came down from the mountain confirmed the reality of choosing the second (14-23).

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Peter, James and John were given a special place in the Twelve (1).
- It was hard for the Gospel writers to describe physically what

really happened to Jesus (2; cf Mark 9:3, Luke 9:29, John 1:14).

- Moses and Elijah represented the Law and the Prophets, appearing in a form recognisable to the disciples, and pointing to Jesus; the awesome relevance of the situation was not lost on Peter (3-4).
- God made it clear that the Incarnation both fulfilled and eclipsed His previous revelation of Himself in all the OT Scriptures (5-8).
- The Resurrection is the key to understanding the whole picture involving OT prophecy, John the Baptist and Jesus Himself (9-13).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- What does it mean to you that Jesus deliberately chose death?

**DAY 19**

*Our only hope*

**THE PASSAGE**

**MATTHEW 17:14-20(21)**

**THE POINT** Our utter lostness, requiring nothing less than the sacrifice of the sinless Son of God as our substitute, is highlighted by both the epileptic's condition, and the inability of even the disciples, whom Jesus had previously empowered to heal (cf 10:5-8), to do anything in their own strength to help the desperate man and boy.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Jesus' glory (1-13) didn't diminish His concern for a lost world.
- The devastating effect of Adam's sin, and our compliance in it, on the whole human race (cf Romans 5:12) is often lost on us because of the shielding power of God's common grace.

We are all under the sentence of death; the man's epilepsy is part of the outworking of that sentence, and reminds us that to some extent all our bodies are failing to function properly as God intended.

- Satan uses every opportunity to upset God's ordered world, but again we see Jesus' complete mastery over him (14-15, 18).
- Jesus' reference to the mustard seed shows that the disciples' inability to heal the boy is due to Man's totally lost/depraved condition, and therefore his innate disjunction from true faith.
- Verse 21 does not appear in the more reliable manuscripts.

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Are we serious enough about Jesus working through us today?

**DAY 20**

*About His Father's business*

**THE PASSAGE**

**MATTHEW 17:22-27**

**THE POINT** Jesus had just one consuming passion: to redeem lost humanity from sin and death, through His death as our substitute, in obedience to His Father's will. But He pursued this purpose in the context of an ordered society functioning under the provision of God's common grace. His redeemed people are citizens of two worlds; but their first allegiance is to the Kingdom of Heaven, and their God will therefore provide for any needs they have while ever they are required to live and serve within this world.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Jesus knew beforehand all the details of His pending death and resurrection because He knew exactly why He had come

(22-23).

- Jesus was obviously aware of the tension Peter was starting to feel between following Him as the true Messiah and submitting to (even religious) human institutions (cf the way he had heard Him speak to the Pharisees in 15:7-9). So He had to show him how God was able to resolve this tension. "To walk and work the law demands, but gives me neither feet nor hands; a better hope the Gospel brings: it bids me fly – and gives me wings!"
- Jesus has total control over all He has made (cf Col. 1:15-17).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- How does this passage help us to conform with Romans 13:1-7?



## Across Australia

### Good news from Iraq

**P**resbyterian army chaplain **Martin de Pyle** reports from Iraq, where he was deployed for the second time in December, that new opportunities arise constantly to witness, encourage, help and just be a mate.

“Every Sunday I hold a church service, which has been well attended. Also, I have started to regularly visit the Fijian soldiers’ camp to do some preaching and teaching along with some pastoral work. Most of them have a very strong faith, and their hymn singing is outstanding. Together with the Australians, all the Fijians attended the Christmas service, and the volume of their singing coupled with their harmonising during the singing of the carols, was beyond description.

“At least twice a week, sometimes more often, I give a presentation on the history of ancient Iraq. During the presentation, along with other background material, I give a complete survey of the Old Testament. We then travel to the excavations of ancient **Ur** where I take them through the ruins of the city, and down into underground tombs that date back some 4300 years. The soldiers do this in their time off, and some have even booked up to do it for a second time!”

Martin seeks prayers for the safety of all our deployed personnel. Pray also that as they serve in this unstable and at times hostile country, they might pause to think about issues that are eternal, and come to know Him who is Lord over all – our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

*Martin de Pyle is deployed to Dhi Qar province in Iraq. He is the chaplain to more than 500 Australian soldiers in the Overwatch Battle Group (West).*

### Klaas Runia dies

**O**ne of the original members of the faculty of the **Reformed Theological College** in Geelong, **Dr Klaas Runia** (born 1926) died on 14 October in the Netherlands. Dr Runia taught systematic theology at the RTC from 1957 to 1971 and had a great influence on its development and believers in many places and congregations through his teaching, writing and speaking. He also served as an

associate editor of the *Reformed Theological Review*.

### Vale Malcolm Cram

**T**he Rev. **Malcolm Donald Cram** died in Canberra on 11 December after a short illness. Mr Cram began his study for the ministry in the 1960s, but for family reasons was unable to proceed beyond licensing to take up an exit appointment. He remained active in the church both in Australia and South Africa (where he moved in 1974).

Returning to Australia in 1977, he settled in Goulburn where he continued his career as a librarian. In these difficult years for the church he threw himself into the life of the **Goulburn Congregation (Argyle Parish)**, which had to regroup following Union.

The call to the ministry had never left him and he applied to the **Presbytery of Canberra**, and was licensed again in 1992. He was ordained and inducted to **Gladesville–Hunters Hill** in 1995.

Ill health, which would dominate the rest of his life, forced him to demit, retiring to Canberra in 2000. But even in retirement he found a niche, becoming moderator of **Belconnen Home Mission Station** (in which parish he lived) and, to the limits his debilities allowed, effectively ministered there.

Malcolm was active in the courts of the church, held a passion for the orderly worship in the church he had known since boyhood, and was possessed of a keen mind with which he gave his all to the service of his Lord, both in secular life and in the ministry.

### Scots overseas

**T**he senior minister of the **Scots Church** in Melbourne, the **Rev. Douglas Robertson**, was recently the guest of the **Briarwood Presbyterian Church** in Alabama while on a study trip looking at the concept of church revitalisation. The study is part of the on-going impact across the country of the recent **Embers to a Flame** conference held in Melbourne and on the Gold Coast.

### Appointments

**T**he Rev. **Robert Boase** was inducted to the **St Ives-Pymble** charge in Sydney on 24 January. Mr Boase, the son of the **Rev. Peter Boase**, will be the youngest minister ever at St Ives-Pymble. He is a graduate of the **PTC Sydney** and has been serving at

**The Entrance** since his ordination in 2001.

The Rev. **Mark Powell** has been called to the **Cornerstone Community Church** in Concord from **Wee Waa**.

**Mr George Michael**, **Mr Kirk Farquharson** and **Mr Peter English** have been ordained/inducted as elders at Cairns Presbyterian.

### Light duties

**D**r **Phil Burcham**, Associate Professor in the School of Pharmacology and Medicine, University of Western Australia, has been appointed as the inaugural chairman of **Festival of Light Australia’s** WA Branch Committee. Dr Burcham and his family worship at Scots Church, Fremantle.

### Encouragement in Cairns

**I**n May 2005, the **Rev. Harry Oh** accepted the call to **Cairns Presbyterian Church**. Harry and his wife **Morna** had originally arrived in Cairns to help with the Korean ministry work part-time. In March 2006, **Pastor Scott Gartshore**, his wife **Heather** and their two boys settled at Cairns, as Scott became assistant pastor with youth and general ministry work. This is exciting for the older members of the church family as 10 years ago Scott left Cairns to study in Sydney and has now returned.

### And in Kenmore

**N**ew church plant **Kenmore Presbyterian Church** has had an encouraging start, growing steadily from the initial Bible study and prayer group. Then came church on Sunday with Sunday school and crèche. The Bible study divided into two growth groups. Next the ladies started a day-time growth group with crèche, followed by a third growth group and the church’s first regular youth group.

It now has an average Sunday attendance of nearly 50 adults and children, more than 20 adults in growth groups, and the congregation’s giving is rapidly approaching what the church needs to be self-funding.

**Minister Steve Blencowe** believes that morning tea is a helpful gauge of where a church is at. If everyone stays around for morning tea – that’s a start. If there are people who willingly serve by providing food – that’s good. But if everyone makes the effort to talk to one another and get to

know newcomers – that’s super. And that’s happening at Kenmore, he says.

## Fairholme appointment

**F**airholme College in Toowoomba has appointed Mrs Sandra Hawken to lead the college into the “Middle School” era. Mrs Hawken has wide experience in independent schools, from supervising girls’ boarding at St Phillip’s College, Alice Springs, to (most recently) head of Junior School at Lindisfarne Anglican School, Tweed Heads.

During these years, Mrs Hawken has raised three children (now adult) and completed a Master of Education degree. In 2004, she was given the Quality Teaching Award of the Australian College of Educators. With her husband Robert, Mrs Hawken is an active member of the Presbyterian Church.

## Matter of principal

**S**ixty people gathered at the Future Contours of Ministry dinner held at St Lucia, Brisbane, in September to meet Dr Bruce Winter, the incoming principal of the Reformed College of Ministries and to hear his thoughts on ministry training. Dr Winter, a world-renowned teacher, the author/editor of several books on the New Testament, and an editorial adviser in the production of the English Standard Version (ESV) Bible, demonstrated his preaching gifts with a captivating presentation.

Dr Winter said theological training could trap Christians in three areas: reading books *about* the Bible and reading it less; talking more *about* God and not to God; and suspending our gifts while we train for academic degrees. But he said the Queensland Theological College (formerly known as the Consortium of Reformed Colleges) sought to provide academic training of integrity, fellowship for personal transformation, and a nexus between learning and serving.

Along with the privilege of having a teacher and scholar of the calibre of Dr

Winter at QTC, the 2007 Year of Excellence will allow students regular contact with faculty and interactive fellowship support groups. Students will also have lunch-time interactions with Christians who practise their faith daily in the secular world.

Dr Winter will teach the first Year of Excellence intensive, *The Cross and the Clash of Cultures* from 12-17 March.



## Around the World

### Fatwa for insulting Christ

**M**uslim fundamentalists in Britain have issued a death sentence on an award winning gay playwright who wrote disrespectfully about Jesus Christ. The Sharia Court of the United Kingdom issued a “fatwa” late last year condemning dramatist Terrence McNally to death for writing the controversial play *Corpus Christi* in which a Jesus figure in Texas enjoys a torrid sexual interlude with Judas Iscariot and later endures crucifixion as “King of the Queers”.

Outside the opening night performance at the Pleasance Theatre in North London, representatives of the Islamic Court solemnly handed out copies of their fatwa, a religious edict signed by Sheikh Omar Bakri Muhammad. The Sheikh reminded the press that Muslims revere Jesus as a messenger of God, even though they discount the story of His resurrection.

The declaration accompanied a cautionary word to British Muslims: Don’t try this at home. “We would warn individual Muslims not to try to carry it out,” the sheikh helpfully explained. If McNally travels to an Islamic state, however, he certainly risks arrest and execution.

### Pastor’s heart attack

**T**he Rev. D. James Kennedy, the long-time pastor of Fort Lauderdale’s Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church and a driving force in the national religious conservative movement, was in a serious condition just before New Year after suffering a heart attack.

Church officials said Kennedy, 76, was rushed to a local hospital from his home in the Coral Ridge neighbourhood. Although they were extremely concerned

about his health, the officials said Kennedy soon became more alert and responsive.

*South Florida Sun-Sentinel*

## Fears for Anglicanism

**T**he Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, has expressed concern about the “recrimination and bitterness” that may accompany a formal split in the 77 million worldwide Anglican Communion – though he admits that “it’s not the worst thing in the world”.

In a television documentary on Canterbury Cathedral broadcast in early January in Britain, Dr Williams said that he was concerned that Christians should not be set more deeply at odds with each other.

“And because I am an ordinary, sinful human being, I fear the situation slipping out of my control, such as it is,” he added.

He declared on the program: “I fear schism, not because I think it’s the worst thing in the world but because, at this particular juncture, it’s going to be bad for us. It’s going to drive people into recrimination and bitterness.”

He said: “We can’t take it for granted that the Anglican Communion will go on as it always has been. There’s no way of moving on without asking the hard questions.”

The worldwide Anglican church has been deeply divided over homosexuality, especially after the church in the United States appointed a gay bishop.

*Ekklesia*

## Polish archbishop resigns

**A**rchbishop Stanislaw Wielgus, who had been appointed the new head of the Warsaw Catholic Archdiocese in Poland, dramatically resigned last month, less than an hour before he was due to be installed in the city’s historic cathedral.

Firm findings by a church commission showed that Wielgus had collaborated with the former communist country’s secret police on numerous occasions.

## Turk criticises Pope

**A**nkara’s top government religious official accused Pope Benedict XVI of “doing injustice to Turkey” by declaring after his historic visit to Turkey late last year that the country’s Catholics live under difficult conditions. In an interview with the semi-official *Anatolian News Agency* published in the liberal *Radikal* newspaper,

## CHRISTIAN SINGLES

*Any nice singles can join!*

Send for **FREE** colour brochure:

PO Box 122 WALLSEND 2287

Ph/Fax: 02 4955 5445

[www.christiansingles.com.au](http://www.christiansingles.com.au)



**Director of Religious Affairs Ali Bardakoglu** complained that the problems of Turkey's religious minorities were exaggerated during the Pope's visit. In an address from Rome after his return, Benedict noted that the "small flock" of Catholics in Turkey "live in conditions that are not easy". His gentle but direct remark echoed similar comments sprinkled throughout his four days of public statements while in Turkey.

*Compass Direct*

## 15 years for 'blasphemy'

**O**n November 26, two Pakistani Christians were sentenced to 15 years in prison and a fine of 25,000 rupees each for burning the Koran. On October 18, Boota and James Masih, a married couple, were asked to clean a Muslim family's store and burn the garbage when they finished. The two gathered all the garbage in a donkey cart and burned it outside the home. Some Muslim neighbors saw the burning and discovered Koranic papers in the fire. An angry mob gathered and planned to burn Christian homes and churches. Police controlled the mob by arresting James and Boota, even though they are illiterate and did not know the contents of the garbage.

## Extremists face death

**A** court in Bangladesh has sentenced two Islamic extremists to death for murdering **Dr Abdul Gani Gomes**, a Christian convert from Islam, in September 2004. Four militants, including the two convicted men, in their words, "hacked him to death". **Hafez Mahmud** and **Mohammad Salauddin** are leading figures in the banned Islamic militant group **Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB)**, according to a BBC report. Both men confessed to killing Gomes on the order of JMB leader **Sheikh Abdur Rahman**. JMB members said they resented Gomes because he had encouraged other Muslims to convert to Christianity. "I am happy that I killed him," Salauddin told reporters as he emerged from the courtroom.

*Compass Direct*

## Church restricted

**T**he government of Eritrea wrested financial and personnel control away from the **Eritrean Orthodox Church** in December, the day after security police jailed nine staff of a Christian aid agency. In an ultimatum delivered to the church's

Asmara headquarters on December 5, the state demanded that all offerings and tithes collected through the Orthodox Church be deposited directly into a government account.

Asmara sources also confirmed that on December 4 security officials arrested nine truck drivers working for Samaritan's Purse, an international aid agency ordered to leave the country last month. Finally, local Christians report that gospel singer **Helen Berhane**, released in late October after more than two years in jail for refusing to recant her faith, is recuperating at her home in Asmara.

## Pastor's wife raped

**A** resident of Elha village in Bihar state, raped the wife of a local pastor in November. Villagers said Hindu extremists encouraged him to rape her in order to disrupt Christian activity there. **Kamlesh Singh Yadav** allegedly abducted and raped 28-year-old **Neelam Paswan**, the wife of **Shriram Paswan**, in a field near her house. The Paswans work with **Faith Fellowship**, a local, registered non-profit organization founded by **Pastor Radhey Shyam Philip**.

"This is a ploy of extremists to drive us out and stop the Christian work in the village," Philip told *Compass*. "When we started the school, some extremists accused us of converting the children."

*Compass* reports that persecution affects both rural and urban populations in India, but Christians living in villages suffer more due to the practice of sharing common facilities and the presence of hierarchical religious and caste communities within the isolated settlements. In addition to violent attacks launched and incited by Hindu extremists, rural Christians face denial of the use of common facilities like ponds, wells, grazing ground for cattle, schools and cremation grounds.

Villagers sometimes rape Christian women as a means of intimidation, but because of the shame associated with rape, few of these incidents are reported.

## Conversion banned

**T**he Congress Party in India has passed an anti-conversion bill in the northern state of Himachal Pradesh, where only 8000 of the more than 6 million people are Christian. Under the bill, any person found forcibly converting another person could be imprisoned for up to two years and/or fined up to 25,000 rupees (\$700).

Anyone wishing to convert to another religion must give prior notice of at least 30 days to the district government or be fined up to 1000 rupees (\$30). **Dr John Dayal**, secretary general of the **All India Christian Council**, termed the move a "cruel joke".

## Christians flee Iraq

**T**he violence in Iraq has prompted half of the country's Christians to emigrate, says an official of the **Chaldean patriarchate of Baghdad**.

In a story that has appeared on the [www.Zenit.org](http://www.Zenit.org) web site, **Auxiliary Bishop Andraos Abouna** explained to the international charity **Aid to the Church in Need (ACN)** the work that ecclesial leaders are carrying out to shelter the more than 35,000 Christians who have sought refuge in Syria.

The church is helping to provide shelter, food and medical support for these and other refugees. The story says that ACN has offered emergency aid to Christians desperate to flee the religious conflict and the dire poverty engulfing Iraq.

The charity is working closely with **Bishop Antoine Audo** of Aleppo, Syria, who launched a humanitarian aid program for refugees, especially in the capital, Damascus. The project includes food parcels and funding for emergency hospital operations.

Bishop Abouna said matters were increasingly dangerous for Christians in Iraq. Up to a dozen churches, monasteries and other church buildings in the Al Dora district of Baghdad have been forced to close. Islamists bent on ethnic cleansing have flushed Christians out of the area, he said. "Of course the people are frightened. But there is something stronger than the fear — it is their faith."

*Assist Ministries*

**Heathmont**  
Presbyterian Church

*Growing in the faith and love of Christ.*

Worship with us each Sunday - 10.00am  
Mornings 9.3-11  
Andrew Venn - (03) 9670 5182  
[www.heathmont.pvic.org.au](http://www.heathmont.pvic.org.au)

## Clergyman released

A Chaldean priest kidnapped in front of his Baghdad home in December has been released, the Chaldean Patriarchate has reported on its official website. **Father Samy Abdulhad Al-Raiys** was freed six days after he had been abducted in Baghdad's Al-Sinaa street near the **University of Technology** while driving to his parish. "It is the fifth priest kidnapped, and two were killed in Mosul," commented one Baghdad priest who requested anonymity. "So many of us are frightened. We are asking, 'Who will be the next?'"

## Convert tried for murder

A 14-year-old convert to Christianity faces murder charges for stabbing her uncle to death in northern Iraq. **Asya Ahmad Muhammad** is on trial in Dohuk city's **Juvenile Court** for plunging a kitchen knife into her uncle's chest last July after he began beating the teenager, her mother and younger brother. The dead man's family claimed the need to restore "honour", supposedly lost because his female relatives were working in public, prompted Sayeed Muhammad's attack on his brother's family. But the Christian girl's lawyer said the real motive for the attack was religious. "The attack on Asya Muhammad and her mother was caused by [Sayeed Muhammad's] family being upset with the father for becoming a Christian," lawyer **Akram Mikhael Al-Najar** told *Compass*.

## Iranians arrested

Iranian secret police began to raid and arrest leaders of one of the Islamic republic's indigenous house church movements

in December, arriving unannounced in the early morning hours to search their homes in Tehran, Karaj, Rasht and Bandar-i Anzali. Several members of the house church movement were called in for a day or more of interrogations and then released. But eight remain under arrest, including one woman. According to one source, those arrested have been told they face 10 accusations, including evangelisation activities and actions against the national security of Iran.



## On the Agenda

### Saddam execution condemned

While the Islamic world's debate on **Saddam Hussein's** execution seems largely centred on its timing during a holy Muslim festival, Eid al-Adha, initial responses from Christian leaders seem to largely recycle the longstanding debate on whether capital punishment is ever justified.

The Vatican's line was unequivocal, with **Federico Lombardi**, director of the Vatican's press office, saying it always opposed capital punishment.

In an official statement, the Vatican said capital punishment was always tragic news, a motive of sadness, even when the person was guilty of grave crimes. Execution could not reconstruct justice or reconcile society, but risked augmenting the spirit of revenge and sowing seeds of new violence.

**Cardinal Renato Martino**, president of the **Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace** said the execution answered "a crime with another crime ... No one can give death, not even the state."

**Jonathan Gledhill**, the **Church of England's Bishop of Lichfield**, was the only mainline Christian leader cited by *Christianity Today* to publicly argue that Hussein's execution was just. He said that anyone who deliberately murdered another human being "immediately forfeited his or her right to life".

The bishop said that there were good reasons to oppose the death penalty but Saddam's execution could not be criticised as unjust because he had been afforded a fair trial and an opportunity to appeal.

Anglican colleagues disagreed, with **Bishop of Ripon and Leeds John Packer** saying: "Maybe it will raise in the public mind how offensive and morally unacceptable this form of justice is. The element of forgiveness central to Christianity is lost in execution."

Before the execution, **Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams** said he did not believe in the death penalty, though Saddam deserved punishment, "because it effectively says there is no room for change or repentance".

American evangelical leaders said little, according to *Christianity Today*, perhaps because "in most evangelical circles there is little condemnation of capital punishment for far less notorious crimes".

*Christianity Today*

## Pastors win appeal

By *Barney Zwartz*

Two Christian pastors found to have vilified Muslims under Victoria's religious hatred law won their appeal in December and hailed the decision as a victory for free speech.

The Court of Appeal ordered the case to be reheard at the original tribunal, before a different judge and with no further evidence. It set aside the orders for public apologies in newspaper advertisements and for the pastors not to repeat their remarks.

In 2005 **Judge Michael Higgins** found that Pastors **Danny Nalliah** and **Daniel Scot** and **Catch the Fire Ministries** vilified Muslims at a seminar on jihad in Melbourne in March 2002, in a newsletter and in a website article. He said these suggested that the Koran promoted killing and looting, that Muslims wanted to take over Australia and terrorists were true Muslims.

In the Court of Appeal, **Justices Geoffrey Nettle**, **David Ashley** and **Marcia Neave** overturned that finding but rejected the appeal that the Racial and Religious Vilification Act was unconstitutional.

They ordered the **Islamic Council of Victoria**, which brought the original complaint, to pay half the appellants' appeal costs, then accepted an ICV submission that the state should bear that cost.

After the hearing, Pastor Nalliah said: "I'm really thankful to the Lord. I would be pleased to see it completed and not go back to the tribunal, but what we got was more than a blessing."

He said it was a great day for free

## Donvale Presbyterian Church

has relocated while church extensions are underway.

You will find us at the  
Seventh Day Adventist Church  
Central Road, Nunawading

Melways 48,D11

Services at 9.30am and 6.30pm  
www.donvale.org

speech. All laws needed to be tested, and this had now been tested and found to be a bad piece of legislation.

Pastor Scot thanked his supporters and vowed to continue conducting seminars on the Koran and Hadiths (Islam's sacred texts). "Some Muslims have got the idea they have to hide the truth, and that's very sad," he said. "People should know it from the primary sources and not be misled by politically correct teachers who don't know the reality of Islam and want to glorify it with false pretensions and assumptions," he said.

Justice Nettle said the tribunal equated hating the religious beliefs of Muslims and hating Muslims because of their religious beliefs. This was not so: many people might despise Pastor Scot's perception of Christianity yet not dream of hating him. "No doubt the purpose of the act is to promote religious tolerance. But the act cannot and does not purport to mandate religious tolerance."

He said whether Pastor Scot's descriptions of Islam were true were irrelevant; the question was whether they incited hatred.

He found that the tribunal was wrong to rule out the section 11 exemption based on a genuine religious purpose.

*The Age*

## Japanese outreach

By Stephen Young

One of the spiritual poverty nations of the world is Japan. It is said that only 0.3% of the nation is Christian and they are considered an unreached people group with the gospel of Christ. Here in Australia there are more than 15 groups scattered around the major cities who are trying to reach the Japanese for Christ. Of these, three are ministering through the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

The Japanese need to be reached through their own language, but it is more effective if it is done in English and Japanese. The **Melbourne Japanese Language Christian Church** began in 1991 at **Canterbury Presbyterian Church** and have more than 50 people attending their Sunday services.

The **Perth Japanese Christian Church** meets in West Leederville and is approaching its sixth year. More than 30 people attend their Sunday services. The **Creek Road Presbyterian Church** in Carina, Queensland has some 60 people attending their Japanese-English service, but about two thirds are not Japanese.

Missionaries who have worked in Japan have been helping these churches and have come from the Presbyterian Church of America and the Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

The church in Melbourne is praying for a bi-lingual minister to take over the ministry there. A number of Japanese adults have been converted and baptised here in Australia.

*Perth Japanese Language Christian Church*

## My staff were killed

Christians in the Middle East have paid a high price for the Iraq war, the publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad and the Pope's controversial remarks about Islam.

Egyptian Copts, Iraqi Chaldeans and the Palestinian Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant communities have faced violence and even death at the hands of their Muslim neighbours.

**Canon Andrew White**, president of the **Foundation for Reconciliation in the Middle East**, told *The Times* that the Iraq war had had a dire effect on the lives of Christians in the region, particularly in Iraq, where he is the vicar of St George's Church in Baghdad.

"All my staff at the church have been killed," he said. "They disappeared about a year ago and we never saw them again. Of the rest of my congregation, most say they have been targeted in some way or have had letters delivered with bullets in them. People forget, or the Islamic groups

don't realise, that Christianity was in the Middle East before them and therefore they see Christians as being part of the Western coalition military presence. Things have got considerably worse since the Iraq war."

Tensions have also increased elsewhere. In Syria one Christian Assyrian said that he was planning to emigrate to Canada because of growing Islamic fundamentalism in a society having to absorb huge numbers of Iraqi refugees.

In Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, Christian Arabs are a vulnerable minority caught between sympathy for their fellow Palestinians under Israeli occupation and their own tensions with the much larger Muslim Palestinian community.

**Hanna Massad**, the pastor of **Gaza Baptist Church**, said that the conflicts highlighted a difficult issue of identity for Christian Arabs. "The issue is who we are. Are we first Christians or are we Palestinians?" he said.

"For me my priority is my faith. I am a Christian first but I am also a Palestinian, I am Arab. Of course as a Christian Palestinian Arab we suffer with the (Israeli) occupation but at the same time I cannot, because of my personal faith, use violence."

In Jordan conditions are easier in a dwindling Christian community that remains an influential force. Here Christian Arabs sent thousands of letters to the Holy See asking the Pope to apologise for his recent controversial remarks about Islam.

*The Times*



## ST ANDREWS CHRISTIAN COLLEGE PREP -YEAR 12

Are you looking for a school that will support you in your God given duty as a parent? Our ethos is to support parents by offering a sound, traditional, academic education within a Christian framework.

**At St Andrews Christian College we want to grow God's kids, God's way!**

Our aim is to provide a traditional, academic education within a Christian framework.

Find out about our special Primary/Secondary transition programme in the Middle School, Accelerated Reading Programme and our LEM phonics scheme.

For further information, application forms or an appointment with the Principal, Mr. Bob Speck, please telephone (03) 9808 9911.

### SPECIAL BENEFITS OF ST ANDREWS

Comprehensive curriculum and consistently excellent academic results

Junior, Middle and Senior School organization

Strong Creative Arts programme

Parental involvement program that ensures a working partnership between staff, students & parents.

Before and After School Care

Easy access via public transport

St Andrews Christian College,  
333 Burwood Highway, Burwood 3125  
Tel: 9808 9911 Fax: 9808 9933  
Email: enquiries@standrews.vic.edu.au

# God's mysterious will

*Providence, like Hebrew, can only be read backwards.*

An encounter with a friend from my teen-age years reminded me of the wise and pithy words of the Puritan writer John Flavel: "The providence of God is like Hebrew words — it can be read only backwards." I was leaving a restaurant in my native town in Scotland one day and there was my friend being helped along by his elderly mother. His condition was just as someone had hinted to me. His had been one of those active, energised, intense spirits; but now his powers had been wasted by a serious car accident.

To my intense delight he recognised me, and for a moment the old energy seemed to surge into his being. Just as quickly it subsided, like a light bulb fusing in the moment of illumination. It was as though the sight of a friend from the past had deceptively invigorated him, only to remind him immediately of his terrible infirmity.

His gesticulations had always been one of his chief characteristics. Now the look in his eyes, the movements of his hands and body all created a wistful melody in the minor key. He was the one who had given me the first Christian books that ever made a real impression on me; who had poured out his own life-energy to befriend me and teach me.

Of this, and other experiences in life, I have sometimes thought, "It just does not seem to make sense." At such times, Flavel's words have often comforted me, and helped me to readjust my myopic spiritual perspective. They have reminded me to fix my mind and heart on God's wise, gracious, and sovereign rule, and on the assurance that He works everything together for His children's good, so that I do not inquire too proudly into why I cannot understand His sovereign purposes.



Sinclair Ferguson

Of course one occasionally meets Christians for whom the Lord's purposes are "all sewn up". They know exactly what He is doing, and why He does it. Such comprehensive wisdom is difficult to dislodge; but sadly it is the precocious wisdom of the immature Christian who has

*The ultimate explanation of the tragedies of life lies beyond our personal lives and even beyond time.*

not yet learned that while "the things revealed belong to us and to our children", there are also hidden and secret things that "belong to the Lord our God" (Deut. 29:29). God's ways and thoughts are not ours. We never have them

"taped". We can no more read in detail God's secret purpose for our individual lives than we can understand Hebrew if we try to read it from left to right. To imagine we can is to be suffering from a form of spiritual dyslexia.

One great reason for this principle is to teach us to "Trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). So perverse are we that we would use our knowledge of God's will to substitute for actual daily personal trust in the Lord Himself.

Flavel's Law (if we may so speak of his wise words) has widespread relevance for Christian living, but is particularly important in four ways:

The big decisions. It is true of the big decisions of life. God does guide His people, and leads them in the right paths (Ps. 23:3). It is a great thing to come to a major decision with the assurance that it is His will. But we would be mistaken to imagine that we therefore knew in detail the reasons behind His plan. Many a Christian has discovered that obedience

to what they believed to be God's will seems to have led to great personal difficulties. Only later do we discover God's purpose in leading us to a new orientation or situation may have been very different from the extrapolation we made from the first points we saw on the divine graph of our lives.

The tests. It is true of the test of life. We struggle to endure them for what they are in themselves. After the event we are relieved to have them at our back. But, in fact, earlier testings are often preparation to strengthen us for later ones. Only when we have been brought through the later one does the earlier one more fully "make sense".

The tragedies. It is true of the tragedies of life. We will not fully see their place in the divine economy in this world. Their ultimate explanation lies beyond our personal lives and even beyond time (think of Naomi's triple bereavement in Ruth 1, and how that led, in the slow unfolding of God's purpose to Ruth's conversion, marriage, motherhood, the coming David and finally the birth of Christ). I have no special insight into God's purpose in the life of my friend; but that He has a gracious purpose is beyond doubt, however opaque it seems at present.

The whole. It is true of the whole of life. As C.S. Lewis illuminatingly put it, only when someone has died do we see his/her life in its completeness. But even then we catch only a fleeting glimpse of what will finally be made manifest. The ultimate unfolding awaits the day when "I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12).

Has it ever struck you that our Lord's words in the Upper Room had long term as well as short term significance? "You do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

*Sinclair Ferguson is an Alliance Council Member and professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary.*

*This article was previously published in Eternity Magazine, May 1988.*



**'THE MANSE'**  
**STANLEY, TASMANIA**  
**Holiday Accommodation**  
 3 bedroom furnished home available to  
 Presbyterian family and friends  
 Very Reasonable Rates  
 For More Information phone:  
 (03) 6458 1116 (03) 6458 1321

# Strength in weakness

*Paradox is at the heart of Christianity.*

Imagine that a Hollywood director wants to make a film depicting God, and that he doesn't know the Christian account of God becoming human (which several directors have already tackled). Surely it would be a special effects extravaganza, dominated by images of glory and power.

What is almost inconceivable is that the encounter should be with a helpless newborn baby in a rough stable, far from the centres of civilisation. It's hard to envisage a less likely way to encounter God – except perhaps as a man nailed to a cross, tortured and torn, slowly asphyxiating. No wonder this portrayal of the divine was, as the Apostle Paul noted, a scandal to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews – and to many since: God identifies himself with suffering humanity, startlingly weak and vulnerable.

Yet weakness is the at heart of the Christian message, a beautiful truth that Christmas should highlight. Unfortunately it is a truth the church often seems to forget, falling instead into the twin perils of legalism and triumphalism. In Australia, too much of the church is comfortably middle class, complacent, and detached from the human misery around and inside it.

Don't mean to disparage the thousands of ordinary Christians who sacrifice time, energy and money in many ministries and who act as the invisible glue that stops society fragmenting worse than it has. But they are not what springs to mind when the ordinary Australian thinks of church.

Hypocrisy, perhaps; wowsersism, probably; fallibility, certainly. But this is a judgment Christians are willing to embrace, for most of them know they are weak. That paradox of strength in weakness in which they put their hope encapsulates much of the power and appeal of Christianity, a religion of paradoxes. Jesus tells us, for example, that the last shall be first and he that would keep his life must lose it (a reference to self-denial rather than suicide). In Christianity there is always tension between the now and the not yet, between doing and not doing, between freedom and bondage, and



**Barney  
Zwartz**

between power and weakness.

John Donne puts it perfectly, addressing God in Holy Sonnet XIV:

*Take me to you, imprison me, for I,  
Except you enthrall me, never shall be  
free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.*



***The atheists' attack is well-founded: Christianity is for the weak and inadequate.***

From the first, the Gospel was good news above all for the poor and oppressed, the alienated and the ill, women and slaves. To them, it brought

comfort and consolation. Listen to the passionate hope that American slaves put into their spirituals. That, of course, is why atheists often actively despise Christianity: they see it as false and deluded consolation for the weak or weak-minded.

I can't count the times atheists have told me that whereas I can't cope without a crutch they have the strength (or courage, or clarity of vision) to see the world as it is without false props. Leaving aside that fact that such unambiguous certainty about metaphysics is itself a false prop, in one sense their attack is well-founded: Christianity is for the weak and inadequate.

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick," said Jesus; "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners." Paul pointed out to the Corinthians that "not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong." Weakness is at the heart of the Christian message.

Unfortunately the church has often forgotten that vital truth, falling into the twin perils of legalism and triumphalism. In Australia, too much of the church is comfortably middle class, complacent,

**Bethel Funerals**



**Committed to pastorally  
care for grieving families**

**An Australian Christian  
Alternative**

**All profits support the  
work of missions**



**24Hr 7 Day Service**  
2 d Cochrane Street, Mitcham.  
Servicing the Metro & Country Areas

**Ph. 9873 8866**

and detached from the human misery around and inside it.

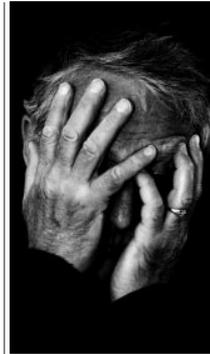
The fastest growing church in Australia, and most of the world, is the Pentecostal church which, in its modern manifestation, turned 100 last year. Far from the first Christian movement to emphasise miracles, ecstatic utterances, prophecy and the Holy Spirit, Pentecostalism was born in a small church in Azusa Street, Los Angeles, where people were speaking in tongues. The movement came to Australia three years later. Today, Pentecostals and charismatics (people of the same beliefs who stay in mainstream churches) comprise about a quarter of the world's Christians, second only to Catholics.

Monash sociologist Gary Bouma, in his excellent new book *Australian Soul*, explains why Pentecostals have moved from working to middle class and become the church for the post-Christian, post-modern era.

He traces three main historical stages. The first was authority, still found in Catholic and Orthodox traditions, with the focus on the eucharist through the agency of the priest, with church architecture designed to inspire awe and emphasise the distinction between the ordinary worshipper and clergy.

The second, the age of reason, dominated the 16th century Protestant Reformation, and was foundational to the emergence of modern societies. Theology became a set of reasoned propositions, and God was seen as law-giver, providing the structure to all of life. Mysticism was viewed with suspicion, and the sermon became the centrepiece of the worship service. This still characterises most main-line Protestants.

***These have become heretical emotions – yet every human, without exception, experiences them.***



The latest stage emphasises experience and participation. The duty of the follower, Bouma says, is “to feel the grace of God, to feel saved, spirit-filled and full of joy”. The emphasis has shifted from correct belief to correct feelings. Pentecostal Christianity offers success theologies, prizing emotion over intellect, “celebration, not cerebration”.

It has brought the era of the megachurch, particularly in the United States, but found at Hillsong in Sydney, or CityLife, Crossway and CareForce in Melbourne. From one perspective – mine, as a “second-stager” – this has not been an unmixed blessing. Their energy, honesty and desire to make their actions reflect their beliefs – in other words, a comparative lack of hypocrisy – are admirable. And a more coherent approach to doctrine has emerged in the past 25 years, giving such churches a firmer intellectual base. The downside, at least in the West, is the way Pentecostals have united religion and worldly aspiration in the health, wealth and happiness teaching known as the prosperity gospel – the perfect religion for a self-obsessed consumerist religion, and a perversion of biblical Christianity.

American author Bill McKibbon cites a *New York Times* reporter who visited a megachurch outside Phoenix, with its “drive-through latte stand, Krispy Kreme doughnuts at every service, and sermons about how to discipline your children, how to reach your professional goals, how to invest your money, how to reduce your

debt. On Sundays children played with church-distributed X-boxes and many congregants signed up for a twice-weekly aerobics class called Firm Believers.”

None of this is so bad in itself, McKibbon suggests. “All the accompanying Christian self-help books have turned people into better parents, better spouses, better bosses. It’s just that the authors of these creeds, in presenting their sensible advice, somehow manage to ignore Jesus’ radical and demanding focus on others.”

Precisely. What’s wrong is that it’s stereotypically out of focus, on self rather than God and on self rather than others. And it’s self-deluding and self-defeating because what do we do with our own pain and failure and doubt and inadequacy? These have become heretical emotions – yet every human, without exception, experiences them.

American theologian Carl Trueman asked three evangelical audiences what miserable Christians could sing in church. Each time, “the question elicited uproarious laughter, as if the idea of a broken-hearted, lonely or despairing Christian was so absurd as to be comical”.

By excluding the cries of loneliness, dispossession and desolation from its worship, the church has effectively silenced and excluded the voices of those who are themselves lonely, dispossessed and desolate, both inside and outside the church, Trueman wrote in *Themelios* magazine (reprinted in *AP* last December).

And at the same time the church has implicitly endorsed the banal aspirations of consumerism, generated an insipid, trivial and triumphalist Christianity and confirmed its impeccable credentials as a club for the complacent. “The idea that Christianity, at whose centre stands the Suffering Servant, the man who had nowhere to lay his head, and the one who was obedient to death – even death on the cross – should be used to justify the idolatrous greed of affluent Westerners simply beggars belief.”

This leads to a further danger: it changes the way Christians see the world. They are taught to expect victory, progress and success at every turn, which is theologically wrong and pastorally disastrous in a world in which suffering is inevitable.

Trueman suggests that evangelicals should start reading the psalms again, the Bible’s own hymnbook, which is often dropped from modern worship in favour of vapid pop ballads precisely because it is largely taken up with lamentation, with



**Interserve Australia is recruiting a National Director**

Interserve Australia is part of an international and interdenominational fellowship of Christians committed to communicating the good news of Jesus Christ, in both word and deed. Interserve now operates in over 40 countries of the world, placing partners to serve among Arab and Asian people groups and supported by home churches.

The person we are seeking will be able to provide leadership for Interserve Australia and communicate effectively the challenge and opportunities of cross cultural ministry.

The closing date for applications will be **19th March 2007**. Further details and a full position description are available on request by contacting:

Dr Christine Gobius,  
Chair Interserve Australia Board  
Ph: 07 3278 0490 (A/H) or email:  
gobius@bigpond.com

feeling sad, unhappy, tormented and broken; emotions that lack credibility in modern Western culture.

Part of the paradox is that weakness adds strength to ministry. Christianity gains purchase when it ministers out of weakness to weakness. The Apostle Paul pleaded with God to remove the "thorn in his flesh" but was told, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12). Modern clergy belong to the class of professional experts who are expected to solve problems quickly and dispassionately – an expectation that helps build the crippling illusion.

The Holy Spirit is called the Paraclete in the Greek New Testament, the one who comes alongside (usually translated as Comforter, Advocate, or Helper). Ministers are those who get alongside those to whom they are ministering. Ministry is not something dispensed from above.

According to the late Catholic mystic Henri Nouwen, "pastoral conversation is not merely a skilful use of conversational techniques to manipulate people into the Kingdom of God, but a deep human encounter in which a man is willing to put his own faith and doubt, his own hope and despair, his own light and

darkness, at the disposal of others who want to find a way through their confusion and touch the solid core of life".

The authority of the church must be compassion. Who can save a child from a burning house without risking being hurt by the flames, Nouwen asks. Who can listen to a story of loneliness and despair without risking similar pains in his own heart or his peace of mind? Who can take away suffering without entering it? The great illusion of leadership, Nouwen says, is to think that people can be led out of the desert by someone who has never been there.

Against all this, the baby in the manger should not be a sentimentalised legitimisation of consumerism and complacency but a rebuke. It's hard to see him with fresh eyes, but we should look again at what he reveals about God and humanity, about the humbling and moving beauty of the incarnation, and about grace.

English priest Daniel O'Leary reflected in *The Tablet* about picking up a tiny baby during a Christmas service. "A baby is an amazing symbol of both power and powerlessness. Or, perhaps, more accurately, of power within powerlessness. As I felt the totally trusting baby stir sleepily in my hands I thought about her utter vulnerability, her total trust. How ambiguous and paradoxical it all was. And how shocking, too. This is what love does. It gives away its power. It renders itself destructible. All this runs against the grain of our competitive and controlling nature. How can weakness be understood as the secret of true love?"

But that is what love is like, O'Leary suggests. It surrenders. It has no more masks, no more expectations, no more certainties.

The Bethlehem baby's defenceless presence, his shocking and precarious weakness, his overturning of all our ideas about the nature of God, stun us into silence.

What could be weaker than the newborn baby in the manger, and what could be stronger than the love that put him there?

*Barney Zwartz is religion editor of The Age, where this article first appeared.* 

*The great illusion of leadership is to think that man can be led out of the desert by someone who has never been there.*

HENRI NOUWEN

*Visiting  
Outback  
Queensland?*

**WORSHIP WITH US AT  
CHARLEVILLE**

**ST JAMES PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
76 GALATEA ST, CHARLEVILLE, QLD**

*Worship Service*

**SUNDAY 9AM**

**CONTACT: REV DAVID KNOTT**

*phone (07) 4654 3100*

*Rejoice!*  
Hymnbook

*Editions available:*

Organists ..... \$40  
Words Only ..... \$16  
Melody Line ..... \$16

*Pray*

**Available Online**

A collection of Prayers for use in public worship.

*Psalm Tree*

**Rejoice Hymn Music CD's**

Music on CD from Rejoice! in a style suitable for congregational singing.

Individual CDs ..... \$15  
Complete 13 CD Set ..... \$180

[www.pwadf.presbyterian.org.au](http://www.pwadf.presbyterian.org.au)

*Worship*

**Book of Common Order of the  
Presbyterian Church of Australia**

Book ..... \$29.95  
CD-ROM version ..... \$34.95

Also available Online

(CD includes Adobe Acrobat RTF files. Suitable for PC & Mac users.)

All prices quoted are inclusive of GST.  
All orders plus postage and handling.

*Available from*

**Mark & Fiona Beavan**

PO Box 3073 South Bowenfels NSW 2790  
ph: 02 6351 2412 fax: 02 6352 5622  
[rejoice@lisp.com.au](mailto:rejoice@lisp.com.au)

**PTC Media**

684 Elgar Rd, Box Hill North VIC 3129  
ph: 0400 880 515 fax: 03 9898 9872  
[ptcmedia@presbyteriancollege.org](mailto:ptcmedia@presbyteriancollege.org)

**Psalm Tree**

ph: 07 4957 2835  
[scotsmky@mackay.net.au](mailto:scotsmky@mackay.net.au)



## Books

## T. F. Torrance

### An Intellectual Biography

Alister E. McGrath

London: T and T Clark-Continuum, 2006.

Reviewed by Stuart Bonnington.

One stands in awe of sheer number of books published by Dr Alister McGrath, who, with this biography, gives the reader who is interested in the development of Christian theology after Karl Barth a surefooted guide to one of his most important disciples, T.F. Torrance.

The description “intellectual biography” is deliberate and considered. Torrance is primarily to be regarded as a man of ideas, someone who has a passion for the life of the mind as it is encountered by the reality of God. McGrath acknowledges that focusing on Torrance as a man of ideas inevitably means diminished attention to issues which might concern a traditional biography.

This is a reprint of the paperback edition of a biography of Professor Thomas Torrance first published in 1999. It is in two parts. The first, on “the emergence of a scientific theologian”, covers fairly standard biographical territory as it plots the life of Torrance from his birth in China in 1913, education in the 1920s and 1930s, first experience as a theological educator at Auburn Theological Seminary (home of the 1924 radically liberal *Auburn Affirmation*), parish and wartime service (1940-50) to his time training students for the ministry of the Church of Scotland, first as Professor of Church History (1950-1952) and then as Professor of Christian Dogmatics (1952-1979).

Even with McGrath’s self-imposed limits, there is a substantial outline of the life of Torrance. But one does feel, especially as the narrative moves closer to its end (which in the first section of the book is 1979), that the story is being given in almost summary form. In this 2006 reprint, the Torrance story stops nearly 30 years ago. As the complete bibliography reveals that Torrance published 266 items from 1980 to 1999, it is unfortunate that opportunity was not taken to bring the narrative of his life up to date. McGrath himself says “Torrance’s ‘retirement’ can only be thought of in terms of a cessation

of administrative and teaching duties. The writing, speaking and research continued at a remarkable rate ... including two of his most significant works – *The Trinitarian Faith* (1988) and *The Christian Doctrine of God* (1996)”.

Torrance was of course of a generation which moved away from classic Reformed theology quite markedly. Here we mean belief in the Bible as the inspired written Word of God and of the Confession of Faith as a faithful summary of the Christian faith.

In a very valuable statement of his basic theological position (which nevertheless is not completely clear) Torrance stated that his belief lay between “rationalistic liberalism” and the “rather rationalistic and fundamentalistic way of interpreting the Bible being advocated in Inter-Varsity Fellowship circles together with a rather deterministic Calvinism which was then mistakenly being imported into the thinking of the Christian Unions”. However, one often gets the feeling that what was being rejected as evangelicalism was actually really a straw man, not being necessarily the true, best or inevitable expression of the historic Christian faith.

With the example of his father, the devoted missionary, and of his mother, the Christ centred believer, Torrance was drawn toward the neo-orthodoxy of Barth, which seemed to preserve the best of the past without any of its perceived negatives. The Scottish theological teacher H.R. Mackintosh was also a great influence on the young Torrance, through his off-repeated aphorism “when I look into the face of Jesus, and see there the face of God, I know that I have not seen that face elsewhere and cannot see that face elsewhere”.

These words were remarkably echoed during Torrance’s war service when he helped a dying soldier prepare for death and eternity. The desire for a Christ-focused, experienced Christianity is laudable, but the question the neo-orthodox believer cannot avoid is, without objective revelation given in the Bible, how sustainable long term is such theology? The tragic decline in the Church of Scotland (except in those parts which have remained true to the classic, confessional view of the Bible) suggests that a church enamoured with neo-orthodoxy (or liberalism) simply runs out of spiritual momentum and begins to dissolve.

I wondered why so little was said of Professor Daniel Lamont, a key influence on Torrance’s view of the relationship

between Christian theology and science. Lamond was a traditional conservative who had missed out in 1914 on the New Testament chair at St Andrew’s College in Sydney (the NSW Assembly appointed Samuel Angus instead). Some readers will also be surprised that McGrath dismisses Cornelius Van Til’s assessment of Barth (and Emil Brunner) as “inept analysis”.

The book’s second half is titled *The Contours of a Scientific Theology*. It has three blockbuster chapters, starting with Torrance and British Barth-Reception. Here the reader is given a fascinating review of the reception of Barthian theology in Scandinavia, England and Scotland and then a discussion of “the mechanics of Barth-reception”. Pages 133 to 145 should be required reading for anyone interested in the course of Christian theology in the late 20th century.

The next chapter, *Revelation and Salvation*, is also excellent, with *The Place and Purpose of Natural Theology* bringing us via the masterful pen of McGrath to the very heart of Torrance’s special understanding of Christianity.

Yet this chapter reveals a great theological irony. This is that Barth’s greatest disciple has made some of his most important and distinctive contributions to Christian theology by rejecting one of the (most?) fundamental aspects of Barthianism – the denial of any kind of natural theology. And that Torrance has done this, because for natural theology to be valid, it needs to be controlled by normative revelation, which must be located “somehow” in the Holy Scriptures. This rejection of Barth’s teaching occurs because “Barth’s objection to natural theology lies in a *conceived danger* (italics mine) – that such a natural theology will be seen as an independent and equally valid route to knowledge of God, which may be had under conditions of our choosing. Yet this danger is averted if natural theology is itself seen as a subordinate aspect of revealed theology, legitimated by that revealed theology rather than by natural presuppositions or insights.”

McGrath says Torrance argues that Barth’s fundamental concern can be identified and honoured. There is indeed a danger that natural theology might become an independent route to knowledge of God, bypassing and marginalising Jesus Christ and Scripture. “Yet if *theologia naturalis* is seen within the ambit of *theologia revelata*, this difficulty is eliminated.” Here the reader could also ask how much else of traditional Reformed

Christianity Barth and his disciples rejected on the basis of *conceived danger*?

It is also hard not to see in Torrance's subtle yet certain rejection of Barth on natural theology, and the form of that rejection, the fundamental problem which has caused others to reject Barthianism on many other matters, namely that without the objective and normative control of the Bible as the Word of God in written form in questions of Christian doctrine, his theology spins off into idiosyncratic conclusions that move him and his followers away from the great historical mainstream of Christian teaching.

The biography has some great pictures (although the quality of their reproduction is not good in some places), a "complete" bibliography (only up to 1999) and a full Curriculum Vitae. We eagerly await the second, fully updated edition of *Torrance: An Intellectual Biography*.

*Stuart Bonnington is minister of Scot's Kirk, Fremantle, WA, and superintendent of the PIM.*

## What the Bible Teaches About Guidance

Peter Bloomfield  
Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2006.  
*Reviewed by Peter Barnes*

**B**ack in 1980 Garry Friesen and J. Robin Maxson published a work on *Decision Making and the Will of God*, which argued from the sufficiency of Scripture against the common evangelical notion that there is a will of God for each of us that we need to attempt to discover. Like Friesen and Maxson, Bloomfield argues that to attempt to discover the secret will of God is folly at best and unbelief at worst (see Deut. 29:29). Eve was told that she could eat the fruit of every tree in the Garden, except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; she was not told specifically what meal to prepare each night. That remained her choice.

Bloomfield writes in a punchy style, and mocks what he calls a "Toyota theology" – that which treats feelings as if they were oracles from heaven. He refers to the notion of ongoing revelation as "the scandal of the church today". At times he seems to be somewhat excessive. The term "peace with God" surely has some subjective element in it. And the "fight fire with fire" approach will break down if someone claims to have received a revelatory dream and you

counter that you had one that said not to listen to the first one. The problem, of course, is that the first person believes his dream is authentic whereas you know that yours is not.

Wayne Grudem's views of non-infallible prophecy get a pasting – as they deserve. Also, Peter deals with Stuart Robinson's views on the place of dreams in many Muslims who become Christians. While Peter is quite vehement against taking these seriously, he nevertheless admits that "it does not deny that God may use such dreams in the process of salvation". This is a difficult issue, and requires a bit more work, although one must say that the whole situation would be a lot clearer if such dreams were not regarded as revelatory.

For the Christian thinking through the matter of guidance, this book would make a wonderful starting point. There is so much angst amongst Christians on this issue, which easily leads to rationalisations and just plain nonsense. It is good to commend a work full of biblical common sense on the subject.

*Peter Barnes is AP books editor.*

## Under the Scaffold

Faith Cook  
Evangelical Press, 2005.  
*Reviewed by Mignon Goswell*

**F**aith Cook, who is well known as a writer of biography, here turns to writing a historical novel. Tom Whittaker is a fictional character but the life he leads is bedded in historical reality. The novel is set in Haworth, England during the mid-1700s. Tom is deeply challenged and affected by the preaching of William Grimshaw who was curate in that village. John and Charles Wesley and George Whitfield also appear in the book. Although Tom and some of the other characters are fictional all that is written about these preachers is factual.

Tom's life is hard and he has to deal with death from a very young age. We find a realistic portrayal of the stages of Tom's spiritual development. The climax, as the title suggests, happens under the scaffold but you may be surprised as to what and where that scaffold is!

Historical novels are a recognised way of letting us live in the age about which we are reading. They bring a different perspective on historical events. This is a good read for teens and adults alike and

is sure to engender an interest in going further into the lives of these great preachers and delving into a period of history that saw remarkable turnings to God.

*Mignon Goswell is manager of PTC Media at the Presbyterian Theological College in Melbourne.*

## Amy Carmichael Can brown eyes be made blue?

Carine Mackenzie  
Christian Focus, 2005.  
*Reviewed by Peter Barnes*

**T**he subtitle of this work comes from the famous prayer of Amy Carmichael as a child, when she asked God that her brown eyes might become blue. She was somewhat bewildered and disappointed when they retained their natural colour!

It is a book that is most suitable for introducing the marvellous and inspiring life of Amy Carmichael to the next generation. It also deals with the issue of God's long-term answers to prayer. In both content and presentation, it is a work that is warmly commended.

**PREZRA  
SCHOOL OF  
THEOLOGY  
AND PCA MINISTRIES**



In our **20/20 Vision** for South Australia and Adelaide, are you someone God is calling to come and live in one of the 20 towns in SA or one of the 20 suburbs in Adelaide to work as a planter of a Gospel (House) Church of the Presbyterian Church of SA?

You may need to come as a **tent-maker** and complete training for acceptance as a **PCA Ministries Worker**, and serve on a faith-and-support basis of 2/3 of the weekly income from the local Church ministry.

**PREZRA** offers free the ThA and advanced Diploma of Theology (ThL) of the Australian College of Theology; and a Home Missionary Certificate (HMCertif) and PREZRA's Diploma of Biblical Studies for lay workers.

**CONTACT:** PREZRA / PCA MINISTRIES  
REV DR REG MATHEWS  
18 ARAGON ROAD,  
INGLE FARM, S.A. 5098  
(08) 83 95 78 41

# prayer

**FEBRUARY 2007**

- 21 Presbytery of Sydney North 21 parishes totaling 24 congregations with about 2820 c&a (communicants and adherents) and 675 yf (younger folk – Sunday School and youth), 2 deaconesses, 1 departmental officer, 1 defense chaplain, 3 theological candidates, 14 retired ministers and 5 under jurisdiction. Colin Short clerk.
- 22 Qld Outreach and Nurture Committee – Andrew Newman convener; John Nicol director, John Mansfield and David Hopper assistants.
- 23 Clayton parish Melbourne with about 145 c&a, 100 yf and 17 e (elders); Michael and Kerry Jensen.
- 24 Ho Ju Young Rak Korean parish, Homebush Sydney with about 55 c&a, 40 yf and 4 e; Stephen and Sarah Kim.
- 25 David and Ashleigh *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Ashfield, Sydney teaching with Pioneers in east Asia.
- 26 The pupils, staff and council of Fairholme College, Toowoomba – Mr J S Klan principal; Richard Jessup chaplain.
- 27 Drouin parish, Gippsland, Vic. with about 220 c&a, 80 yf and 15 e; Ken and Gianna Brown.
- 28 New Life home mission station, Camira, southern Brisbane with about 30 c&a and 5 e; Will Henderson.

**MARCH 2007**

- 1 Presbytery of Derwent, southern Tasmania – 5 parishes including 3 special (home mission) parishes totaling 6 congregations with about 435 c&a and 120 yf, 1 retired minister. Robert

- White clerk.
- 2 Pray for the Interim moderator, preachers and filling of the vacancy in Bowenfels parish (Lithgow area, NSW) including Mt Lambie, Portland and Wallerwang with about 65 c&a and 7 e.
- 3 Kaniva-Nhill home mission station western Vic., with about 55 c&a, 15 yf and 3 e; Ron and Jean Williamson.
- 4 Peter and Anne Burke *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Wahroonga, Sydney in financial and hospitality work with SIM International in Jos, Nigeria.
- 5 Greg and Rosemary Braid *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Tasmania and Victoria in linguistic research with Wycliffe Bible Translators in South Asia.
- 6 Steve and Lisa North starting ministry in Moss Vale parish including Burrawang, Bundanoon and Berrima NSW southern highlands with about 100 c&a, 15 yf and 11 e.
- 7 Numurkah parish Vic. including Tallygaroopna and Cobram with about 90 c&a, 6 yf and 8 e; Frank and Merle Savage.
- 8 St Marys parish outer western Sydney with about 70 c&a, 20 yf and 5 e; Les and Shirley Fowler.
- 9 Bundoora parish northern Melbourne with about 170 c&a, 40 yf and 3 e; Neil and Jayne Chambers and John and Elizabeth Diacos.
- 10 Presbytery of Benalla, Vic.- 7 parishes and 2 home mission stations totaling 22 congregations with about 635 c&a and 140 yf, 1 retired minister. Robert Finster clerk.
- 11 Noel and Catherine Carpenter *mission partners* (APWM) workers from

- Hobart training with Missionary Aviation Fellowship to work in PNG with Wycliffe Bible Translators in aviation.
- 12 Pray for the Interim moderator, preachers and filling of the vacancy in Whitfords parish, Perth with about 150 c&a, 75 yf and 6 e; Paul Spackman.
- 13 Surrey Hills parish Melbourne with about 140 c&a, 35 yf and 10 e; Chris and Rose Siriweera; and the Deaf Christian Fellowship which meets there – Tony and Anne Salisbury.
- 14 Wingham and Upper Manning parish NSW North coast including Krambach with about 50 c&a, 15 yf and 2 e; Michael and Roslyn Deal.
- 15 Willows (Thuringowa) parish North Qld with about 95 c&a, 80 yf and 6 e; David and Elizabeth McDougall.
- 16 Ministry and Mission Committee, NSW Peter Currie convener; Bruce Meller and John Invin superintendents.
- 17 Stephen (and Naomi) Lilley *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Hurstville in translation with Wycliffe Bible Translators in South Asia.
- 18 Coffs Harbour parish NSW North coast including Woolgoolga with about 295 c&a, 85 yf and 9 e; Jamie and Jenny Newans.
- 19 John and Karine Woldhuis *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Sydney as church planters in Ecuador with SIM International.
- 20 Chester Hill parish Sydney including Vietnamese and Burmese congregations, with about 40 c&a and 5 e; Luke and Hae Ja Yoo.

## AUSTRALIAN Presbyterian

# Subscription form

Please send me *Australian Presbyterian* magazine ...

- 1 year subscription (11 issues) (\$38.50 inc. GST)
- 2 year (\$66.00 inc. GST)
- Overseas: \$A45 per year       Donation
- Magazine Missions               Gift Subscription

Deliver to:

Name .....

Address .....

..... City/Suburb .....

State ..... Pcode .....

Country .....

Phone .....

**Payment Details**

Please find enclosed

- Cheque/money order to *Australian Presbyterian* for: \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Please debit \$ \_\_\_\_\_ from my
  - Visa                       Bankcard                       Mastercard

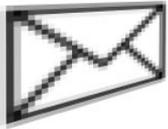
Account number:

Expiry date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Name on Card \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**Please send completed forms to:**

Australian Presbyterian PO Box 375, Kilsyth VIC. 3137  
 Phone: (03) 9723 9684. Fax: (03) 9723 9685. Email: aus-pres@bigpond.net.au



Letters

Forget not Israel

Re the articles on Israel (AP, November), to be fair, a case for the other side should be stated.

First, the promise of the land of Israel to Abraham was forever. The same word is also used about God's existence, everlasting life, the Noahic and New Covenants. None of these are temporary. The covenants cannot be lightly dismissed unless we have clear evidence to the contrary. Israel miraculously still exists. This points to the covenant's persistence. We have no business cancelling God's promises.

Second, the New Testament supports God's covenant with Israel. Romans 9:4 confirms that the covenants belong to the people of Israel, and Romans 1:28 states that Israel is loved because of the patriarchs. The covenants are ongoing.

Third, the Bible contains prophecies about the Messiah as the conquering King of Israel who will rule the world. But to fulfil them the Messiah has to be the King of Israel. Christ's claim to a literal kingship of Israel as a nation in its land on the

day of his return is a serious possibility. We should not lightly dismiss a further need for Israel.

Finally, there is a clash of world views at the heart of this issue – Islam (often supported by secular materialism) against a biblical world view. Fundamentalist Islam dominates much of the Middle East. This claims the whole land and endorses Koranic prophecy about the destruction of the Jews. Unless a literal reading of the Koran is renounced, political settlements will be deceptions. Christians should support the Jews in their claim to the land. Those who seek the destruction of Israel should be seen as enemies of a legitimate sovereign state. (For a political justification of Israel see "Big Lies" on www.front-pagemag.com)

Stephen Moody,  
Beaconsfield, Vic

Keeping our religion

Either God is, or religion is. Barney Zwartz seems to think religion is (AP, November). He writes, "Muslims are right to demand religious freedom in the West." Why? It is antichrist in its own lands, is it not also in the West? Is there a right to practise just any religion? A Nicolaitan, where the religious

leader replaces God, an agnostic, atheist or humanist agrees, for it does not matter when God is not a person but an idea.

Where God is, there is God's Word, good, truth, heaven, blessing. But there is also the lie, evil, a devil, hell, and a curse. Religions contrary to God's Word are evil. The Jonestown massacre sprang from evil religion; from the lie; from Satan. Baal worship and witchcraft are evil. When God turns a fertile land into a desert it is because the people are evil, believing the lie, practising religion contrary to the Word of God. They are cursed. When God prospers a nation, making them great, a blessing to others, it is because God has known them, and blessed them.

Freedom to practise any religion denies the existence and nature of God. It is the catchcry of the foolish who never see the judgment ahead. False religion is antichrist; it cannot but oppose true religion. Its adherents will always be an enemy, never a friend, "Can two walk together unless they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3).

We won the right to choose our religion in the Reformation. Let's keep it.

Neil Cadman,  
Norman Park, Qld

Your name in their hand every day

Pens Drink Bottles Keyrings  
Clocks Business Cards Mugs  
Shirts Conference Items Caps

.....or 1000's of other items with your name and logo on them



IMPRESSIVE PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS  
ph 03 9747-0754

sales@promotionalprinting.com.au

www.promotionalprinting.com.au

Visiting Ballarat?

Worship with us at  
Ebenezer Presbyterian Church.  
Every Sunday 10.30 am.  
214 Armstrong Street South.  
Rev. Dr John Woodward  
Phone: (03) 5334 2909



SCOTCH COLLEGE MELBOURNE

Scholarships

Applications are invited for scholarships for entry to Year 7 or Year 9 in 2008

- Academic Scholarships - Full and half scholarships
- Boarding Scholarships
- Music Scholarships
- Means-tested scholarships

Examination date: Saturday, 24 February, 2007  
Music Auditions: Sunday, 25 February, 2007  
Applications close: Thursday, 15 February, 2007

For entry forms and further details contact

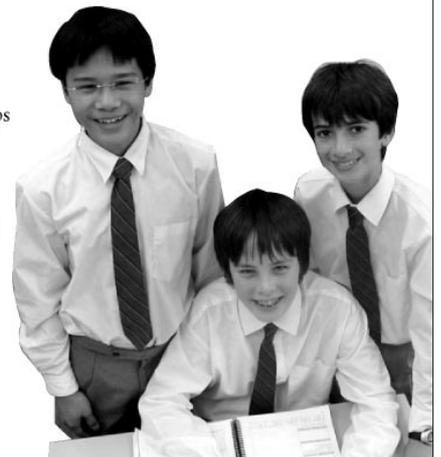
Admissions Office

Tel: 03 9810 4203 / Fax: 03 9810 4333

Email: Admissions@scotch.vic.edu.au

An Independent School for Boys

Based upon Christian principles, Scotch College has a proud tradition of academic excellence, an extensive sporting and co-curricular program and outstanding facilities in a convenient location.



www.scotch.vic.edu.au 1 Morrison Street, Hawthorn Vic 3122

# Welfare to work

*The Bible shows us how to look after the poor.*

**D**r Samuel Johnson declared that “a decent provision for the poor is the true test of civilisation”. Whether it is *the* test may be debatable, but it is certainly a crucial test. If we love God, we must also love our neighbour, including our poor neighbour. In William Tyndale’s view, “the most despised person in the realm ought to be treated as if he were the king’s brother”.

The Old Testament teaches that strangers, widows and orphans are not to be oppressed (Ex. 22:21-27), but treated with open hearts and hands (Deut. 15:7-10). Vineyards were not to be completely reaped or gleaned so that some of the crop could be left for the poor and the stranger (Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:17-22).

The Lord is described as the God who “administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger” (Deut. 10:18). He is “a father of the fatherless, a defender of widows” (Ps. 68:5) – a concern which is strongly and cogently reaffirmed in Psalm 146. The believing community is to look after its weaker members and, indeed, all who come within its orbit.

As a result of God’s character and His law, the prophets were vigorous in their condemnation of those who oppressed orphans and widows (e.g. Isa. 1:17,23; 10:1-2; Jer. 5:28; Ezek. 22:7; Mal. 3:5). Likewise, in the New Testament, the Pharisees were condemned for devouring widows’ houses (Mt. 23:14). The believer is therefore to be one who is “a helper to those who have no protector” (Job 29:12). He or she is “to visit orphans and widows in their trouble” (James 1:27).



**Peter Barnes**

“He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and He will pay back what he has given” (Prov. 19:17; see Ps. 41:1).

Having established the Christian obligation to look after the poor, one also needs to point out the complementary obligation not to abuse this charity. The apostle Paul is quite blunt in his correspondence with the Thessalonian Christians:

*It is noteworthy that the Old Testament instituted a system of welfare, but not welfarism.*

“If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat” (2 Thess. 3:10). As Thomas Watson put it: “God will bless our diligence, not our laziness.”

The medieval period often extolled the virtues of the beggar, as one who embraced what Francis of Assisi called “Lady Poverty”. Jacques de Vitry (c.1160-1240) even told of two beggars – one blind, the other lame – who were healed against their wills when they could not get out of the way of a procession bearing the miracle-working body of Saint Martin. The supposed miracle destroyed their easy-going lifestyle. The Reformation, however, rightly insisted that none should beg who were able to labour.

It is noteworthy that the Old Testament instituted a system of welfare, but not welfarism. The poor person had to actually glean the vineyard in order to obtain his next meal. As a widow, Ruth, in the book named after her, carried out this practice, and so met her kinsman-redeemer and future husband, Boaz.

In the New Testament, only morally qualified widows were to receive support from the church (1 Tim. 5:5-7,9-15). The Bible forbids us to support “merry widows” or freeloaders. Furthermore, the task of providing for any widow is said to

be the job of her family first (1 Tim. 5:4,8,16). It is a sad fact that charity can promote irresponsibility and dependency. It is neither compassionate nor helpful simply to throw money at poverty, and make-believe that if the poor have the income to gamble and sustain a drug habit, we have shown kindness to them.

To quote the Puritan, Richard Stock: “This is the best charity, so to relieve the poor as we keep them in labour. It benefits the giver to have them labour; it benefits the commonweal to suffer no drones, nor to nourish any in idleness; it benefits the poor themselves.” If that is true, it has implications for public policy. To link charity to work for those who are capable of it is to treat the poor as human beings with capacity and dignity.

**W**hen asked why he laughed at political schemes which were supposedly designed to improve the lot of humanity, Dr Johnson replied that “most schemes of political improvement are very laughable things”. Politicians are fond of making ludicrous promises. While he was Prime Minister, Bob Hawke promised that by 1991 no Australian child would be living in poverty. The Bible is rather more sober about life this side of glory. The very part of the Old Testament which declares that there will be no poor among God’s people (Deut. 15:4) also notes that there will always be poor people in the land (Deut. 15:11). Just before His crucifixion Jesus endorsed that latter statement (John 12:8).

We are to strive to bring about a situation where there is as much justice and compassion as possible, without falling for the utopian line that heaven can ever be created on earth. Jonathan Edwards declared in a sermon on *Christian Charity* based on Deuteronomy 15:7-11 that “it is not merely a commendable thing for a man to be kind and bountiful to the poor, but our bounden duty, as much a duty as it is to pray, or to attend public worship, or any thing else whatever; and the neglect of it brings great guilt upon any person”.

*Peter Barnes is minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, Sydney.* 

## DARWIN

*Australia's remotest Presbyterian Church*

Services 9:30 am  
Casuarina Square Shopping ctr

Minister: Rob Duncanson  
PH. 08 8988 9911

www.darwinpresbyterian.org.au