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Presbyterian

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november 2008



the divine rescue

LAW & GRACE IN GALATIANS

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editorial

One of the distinctive and most appealing features of Christianity is that it stands alone among all the great world religions in proclaiming that salvation is a divine rescue. The gospel announces deliverance and emancipation. This is its distinctive glory.

Perhaps this explains why Paul's Letter to the Galatians has won an enduring place as one of his most precious legacies to successive generations of believers. It is essentially a manifesto on how the believer is rescued from the bondage of sin, the curse of the law and the power of the devil.

The theme of rescue comes to the fore in Paul's introductory words where he reminds us that "Christ died for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age" (1:4). J.B. Lightfoot says that this word "rescue" strikes the keynote of the epistle. By referring to Christ's work as a "rescue", Paul announces that Jesus Christ has accomplished a deliverance that vastly exceeds both in scope and power the claims of all other religions. While Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism proclaim a form of "Do-It-Yourself" salvation, Christianity is unique in asserting that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ. And, in a nutshell, this explains the abiding relevance of the Letter to the Galatians. It acts as a safeguard against every new claim of human self-redemption. Luther puts it like this: "These words are very thunderclaps from heaven against all kinds of righteousness", that is, all forms of self-righteousness.

Since Christianity is both a religion of rescue and a protest movement against self-righteousness, it's not surprising that its message has been fiercely contested in every age. Paul always provoked controversy through his preaching of grace, and the Pauline gospel sparks a similar reaction today. This has led modern scholars like C.H. Dodd to say "sometimes I think that Paul is wrong and I have ventured to say so". Indeed, it has become increasingly common for people today to challenge Paul's authority and to dismiss out-of-hand his teaching on critical issues like justification by faith, substitutionary atonement, gender roles and homosexuality. It is for this reason that we have decided to explore some of the issues that come to the surface in Paul's Letter to the Galatians. They are as relevant today as they were then.

Peter Hastie *ap*

Trouble in Galatia

We are all Pharisees at heart. The church is never more than a step from disaster.



Peter Barnes is a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. He serves in Sydney's south-west in the parish of Revesby. He is also lecturer in church history at the Presbyterian Theological Centre, Sydney. He has formerly served as missionary/theological educator in Vanuatu and has been deeply involved in the cause of Christian education.

Peter has had a long-standing interest in church history and undertook a doctoral dissertation on the history of the Presbyterian Church of NSW. He also has an intense interest in Scripture and biblical theology. He has written several Old and New Testament commentaries, *Both Sides Now – Ecclesiastes and the Human Condition*, *Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, *Knowing Where We Stand – The Message of John's Epistles* as well as *The Milk of the Word* and a book on social ethics, *Open Your Mouth for the Dumb*.

Peter is married to Lynette and they have six children.

Peter, who is the letter to the



**Peter Barnes
talks to
Peter Hastie**

Galatians written for, and what sort of spiritual problems does it deal with?

The letter was written for Christians who lived in Galatia, which is a region of northern Asia Minor, or what is now Turkey. They were the first churches planted by Paul and Barnabas after they set out on their mission to the Gentiles. We think the letter was written about AD 48 or 49 – less than 20 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. Most scholars think it was written before the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15.

Paul makes it clear in the letter that he is deeply agitated by news that the believers there were starting to doubt the message of the gospel that he had preached to them. The letter is a fiercely worded attack on his opponents as well as a plea to the Christians there to hold on to the

apostolic gospel. Alan Cole calls the letter "spiritual dynamite". Paul's opponents are a group of people who are called "Judaisers". These people had persuaded the Galatians that in addition to trusting in Jesus Christ as Saviour they must also be circumcised, as well as keep the Jewish holy days and food laws if they wanted to be saved.

Paul says that he is "astonished" by their willingness to believe a gospel other than the one that he had first preached to them. Their problem was that they were trying to modify the gospel by adding to the finished work of Christ. While it may seem to us that Paul is making a mountain out of a molehill, the reality is that you only need a little poison in a cup to make it lethal for anyone who drinks it. This letter takes us to the very heart of God's message to us in the gospel: the law condemns, and only God's grace in Christ can save us. This means that we dare not add our own works to what God has accomplished for us in Christ.

Were the Judaisers Christians?

They said they were Christians, but Paul doesn't treat them as such. He regards them as spiritual enemies. Although they would have claimed church membership, Paul calls them "troublers... who distort the gospel of Christ" (1:7). They preached that unless you are circumcised according to the customs of Moses, then you cannot be saved. In this sense, they added to the gospel.

The funny thing about them is that they seemed orthodox in every other way. There is no hint that they denied that Jesus was both Lord and Christ. They also seemed to believe that Christ died for sinners and that He rose again from the dead. There's no suggestion that they thought otherwise. Nevertheless, Paul makes it clear that something very drastic was wrong. He says that they were turning to a different gospel, which was really a false gospel, and so were perverting the gospel of Christ.

It's amazing, isn't it? They believed in Christ's deity, His death and resurrection – yet they were defecting from the gospel! Paul says that their error was that they claimed that sinners had to do certain works of the law to be saved. This is where they were wrong. As Martin Luther once said: "If the article of justification be once lost, then all true Christian doctrine is lost as well."

Does this issue create the strident tone of the letter?

Yes, it does. It's no surprise that this is the sharpest of Paul's letters and that it has offended many readers down through the ages. In one sense it's the toughest of Paul's letters to preach through. Personally, I've found it difficult preaching on Galatians. If you are not careful, the vigorous nature of the letter can lead you to over-react. It's certainly not a soothing letter like Philippians, for example. I think the words "joy", "rejoice" etc occur something like 16 times in four chapters of Philippians. Basically, Philippians is a happy letter, but in Galatians Paul jumps straight into the ring and throws some hard-hitting punches. And if you work your way through Galatians, your congregation can sometimes feel as though it's taking some pretty strong body blows! So preachers need to be sensitive in the way they expound the letter.

Have you preached through Galatians?

Yes, I have. It's certainly a challenge. It has such enormous intensity that if the

preacher is not careful, it's easy to become strident. If all a preacher ever focused on was Galatians then he might develop a tendency in that direction. That's why I think it's important to read from many different parts of the Bible – it keeps you balanced.

Incidentally, if you're going to preach on Galatians it might be worth breaking up the series into several parts so that you don't just have one long series on the letter. You might also want to intersperse it with other themes from different parts of the Bible. It's not that I have any misgivings about Paul's teaching in Galatians – I don't; it's just that the letter is so vigorous it could provoke an over-reaction in some people and I don't think that would be helpful.

It's just one of those frightening things that people in ministry have to face from time to time.

To what extent does this letter deal with the ongoing problem that faces Christians when we are tempted to revert to the law as a means of salvation?

Galatians deals with several problems which centre upon how a sinner is made righteous before God. Paul is at pains in this letter to remind us that we are not saved by performing "works of the law". When he uses this expression he is not thinking simply of things like the rite of circumcision and keeping the Sabbath; rather, he has in mind whatever God's law requires of us.

The problem is that the cults teach that we are saved by performing these works. In their view, neither the blood of Christ nor His righteousness is enough to finally save us. For instance, Herbert W. Armstrong of the Worldwide Church of God says: "God does not impute to you something that you do not have." In other words, in Armstrong's eyes Christ's righteousness will do you no good; what you need is your own righteousness. Armstrong doesn't actually come out and say that Christ died in vain, but that's the only conclusion you can come to. The problem is that to trust in Christ plus what you do is ultimately to trust in what you do.

Are there other issues relating to our

justification that Paul deals with?

Yes, there are. One of them concerns our equality before God. Since Jew and Gentile are both saved through faith in Jesus Christ, this means that both can sit together at the Lord's Supper. In this sense, justification by faith has profound social consequences.

One of the best examples of this is seen in the ministry of William Carey who worked in India. Many Indians from different castes became Christians through his work. Suddenly, members of the Brahmin caste had to join with members from the lowest caste – the untouchables – at the Lord's Supper. Carey realised that if the various castes were allowed to celebrate the Lord's Supper in isolation from one another, then the church was in effect saying that there were two ways of salvation, two different ways to be justified. In other words, they did not have equal access to God. However, Paul makes it clear that the unity of the church is a necessary consequence of the gospel. There's no room for class distinctions or snobbery in the church. Rich and poor, black and white are all welcome at the Lord's table.

Do we have any idea of how successful Paul's gospel preaching was among the Galatians?

It seems that the Galatians made a genuine response to Paul's preaching when he evangelised them. They clearly understood and accepted the gospel. Nevertheless, almost immediately afterwards some Jewish believers among them began to promote error and threw the church into confusion. It was every pastor's nightmare!

While this no doubt took everyone by surprise, I think preachers today should not despair if something like this happens to them. If it can happen to Paul, it can happen to us. It's just one of those frightening things that people in ministry have to face from time to time. For instance, if you look at church history you will realise that what happened in Galatia has happened in many other places too. The John Frum movement – an aspect of the cargo cult – broke out in Vanuatu in 1941. In the short space of a week the churches on the islands – Presbyterian, Seventh Day Adventist and Roman Catholic – crashed in a heap. They went from having a significant proportion of the islands turning up each week to very small numbers. It's an amazing thing, but it can happen. Paul isn't the only person in Christian ministry who has witnessed such a quick reversal

following what seemed like great success.

I think it's a reminder to us that church leaders have to be vigilant and constantly on the alert to attempts to undermine the gospel. We can never take anything for granted. Look at modern Turkey! It's hardly a thriving Christian community today; it hasn't been for centuries. We cannot assume that preaching the gospel in one place secures it forever as a Christian church.

So what sort of initial response was there in Galatia? Do we have any record of it in the Scriptures?

There was actually a very positive response to Paul's preaching at the start. Luke tells us that "many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas ... who urged them to continue in the grace of God" (Acts 13:43). Elsewhere we read, "the word of the Lord spread throughout the whole region... a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed ... and they won a large number of disciples" (Acts 13:49; 14:1, 21). So it's clear that Paul set up a number of genuine Christian communities. Further, we learn that he visited these communities more than once "to strengthen the disciples and encourage to continue in the faith" (Acts 14:22) He also reminded them that the Christian life would be filled with hardship (Acts 14:22). It seems as though Paul had done everything he could to prevent apostasy and spiritual decline. And then suddenly, everything blew up not long after he left them. Even though Paul would have been prepared for this sort of reversal, the way he writes in Galatians suggests that it was still a shock for him.

So, in a sense, this letter to the Galatians is a wake-up call to church leaders that trouble can surface unexpectedly in the church, especially after great success?

I think that's true. Much can be lost in a short time. Moses was on Mt Sinai for

only 40 days and the Israelites built the golden calf during that time. The spiritual life of Israel looked fairly bright in Joshua's day, but it took a serious nose-dive soon after his death. Paul knew that the big test for Christians comes when a strong and faithful leader departs from the scene. Whether we realise it or not, sometimes all that separates us from trouble is as thin as a cigarette paper! The fact that the West has known gospel privileges in the past may mean nothing now. As the

Puritan William Perkins puts it, "All visible churches upon earth ... are subject to apostasy".

It is remarkable that Paul can give thanks for the Corinthians but cannot find it within himself to do the same for the Galatians.

Is there any significance in the way Paul begins his letter by mentioning the death and resurrection of Christ without saying a single word about anything we do for God?

Yes, I'm sure there is. I think verse 4 is a key to the letter, "He gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father." That's essentially the gospel; everything else flows from it. It's a reminder that we cannot add a single thing to the work of Jesus Christ for sinners – neither circumcision, nor observing certain days, nor anything like that. We contribute nothing to our salvation.

Does Paul's failure to give thanks for the Galatians, as he does for other congregations, reveal anything about the seriousness of the problem?

I think it's highly significant! Think of the situation in Corinth. It was an absolute mess – the church was divided into various groups, there was a case of incest, people were taking out lawsuits against one another, sexual immorality was rife, there were problems with idolatry, disputes over gender and rivalry over the use of spiritual gifts. Then, to top it all off, there was drunkenness at the Lord's Supper. Nevertheless, he says to the Corinthians, "I always thank God for you because of His grace given you in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:4).

Now I find it remarkable that Paul can give thanks for the Corinthians but he cannot find it within himself to do the same for the Galatians. That has to be

highly significant. If you have ever written a book review you know that you should say something nice somewhere about the author, even if the book has got some major problems. That's the way we work. Even when we have something critical to say about someone, we generally find something that we can praise as well. Well, Paul throws those rules out the window when it comes to Galatians. The Galatians get no praise at all. I think this shows just how seriously Paul viewed their rejection of the true gospel.

Why was the issue of circumcision such a big deal? It was only a minor operation on an unseen part of the body.

We need to understand Paul's method of dealing with issues before we can fully appreciate why he made the matter of circumcision such a big deal. For instance, there are some issues that perplex Christians that do not put our salvation at risk. For example, in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8-10 we see Paul dealing with issues relating to food offered to idols and the like. These were issues which separated strong and weak Christians. But here in Galatians the issues are different. They are not issues separating the strong from the weak; rather, they are issues which separate true believers from false ones.

The problem was the significance that the Judaisers attached to circumcision. They said it was necessary to undergo this surgical operation to be saved. Eating food sacrificed to idols may or may not be sinful depending on whether you are a strong or weak Christian, but it doesn't imperil your salvation.

So circumcision was only a big deal because the Judaisers claimed that it was something that was essential to our salvation?

Yes, that's right. They claimed it was essential to be righteous before God. You couldn't do without it. For example, it's like a Seventh Day Adventist saying, "Unless you keep the seventh day (Saturday) holy, you can't be saved." Obviously, that's quite different from saying, "I believe that Bible teaches that we should keep Saturday as a holy day, however you can still be a Christian if you honour Sunday instead." The second approach is quite different from the first.

What's the greater danger facing the church – errors inside or outside the church?

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I think errors inside the church are always of greater danger because they have greater capacity to corrupt our message. I am not convinced that Islam is the greatest problem facing the western world just now. It's certainly a substantial problem, but the biggest problem for the church is its own apostasy and weakness. It's appalling. The most blatant example at the present time is the equivocation on key issues by the Archbishop of Canterbury. He is the head of a major Protestant denomination but he is abandoning important historic positions of the Christian faith.

Such as recently when he led the church in apologising to Charles Darwin's family?

Precisely! He made a mockery of the church. Darwin's theories are just that – theories. Darwin says he actually lost his Christian faith. And yet the Church of England fawns on him. He wasn't a believer and he wasn't persecuted; yet the church goes cap in hand to him and offers a retrospective apology. It's quite extraordinary when you consider that Darwin's views on evolution are unproven speculation. The fossil record furnishes no clear-cut proof in support of them.

How do you answer scholars who say that the Protestant reformers like Luther and Calvin have misunderstood Paul's teaching about justification by faith?

Scholars such as E.P. Sanders, James Dunn and Tom Wright, who are leading spokesmen of what is called "The New Perspective", believe that the reformers have misunderstood the nature of first century Judaism by thinking that it taught a "works-based righteousness". However, their claims have now been shown to be wrong. Many studies of Second Temple Judaism reveal that it did teach a form of "works-righteousness".

This is obvious from the parable which Jesus tells about the Pharisee and the tax collector who come to the temple to worship. Ask yourself: What does the Pharisee believe and what does he rely upon as he comes before God? He's not just claiming that he has the marks of being a Jew such as circumcision. Presumably the tax collector could plead the same thing. No, he pleads moral purity – "I am not like other men, robbers, evildoers or adulterers..." The Pharisee is trying to justify his acceptance before God on moral grounds. That's the kind of Pharisaism that Paul was dealing

with in the first century and the reformers were right to point it out. Pharisees may have talked about grace but their emphasis was mainly on the merit needed to be righteous before God.

Obviously you can't have grace and merit together, but people have tried throughout the ages. And that's what we find in the first century – all sorts of inconsistencies and confusion. People spoke about giving alms to atone for sin, being good to atone for being bad as well as receiving grace. Of course, not everything that New Perspective scholars say is wrong, but their claim that Luther and Calvin misread Paul is a serious error. The upshot of it all is that the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith has been vindicated as true.



We get our theology wrong because we are morally wrong – we suppress the truth because of unrighteousness.

To what extent was Paul's fight in Galatia a victory for spiritual freedom and what would have happened if he had lost?

Paul certainly represents his struggle as a battle for freedom. It's not the only issue in the letter but he does say in 5:1 that "it is for freedom that Christ has set us free". Since that's so, he warns us not to allow ourselves to be burdened by any form of spiritual slavery. The gospel of grace liberates us. It proclaims freedom. It's like the Old Testament Year of Jubilee when all the Israelites' debts were cancelled and slaves were set free.

It's hard to appreciate how liberating this freedom is until you have had a powerful experience of the bondage of superstition. I was recently in Nepal and got a taste of how oppressive superstition is. First, there was the bondage of error. I found it tragic watching people prostrate themselves before idols that are without life and power and which can be kicked over so easily. The amazing thing is that people willingly subject themselves to these impotent gods.

The other thing that struck me was the bondage of a religion based on works, which is what Hinduism is. People pay a

fortune to travel to the Bagmati River where they try to wash away their sins. Who are they kidding? It was a stinking river that you wouldn't even dip your toe into. It was downright dangerous! The whole thing was so fraudulent, right down to the Hindu holy men who wanted to charge anyone who took their picture. One of them tried to charge me. He reminded me of Benny Hinn, who always has his hand out for money. Sadly, none of the Hindus I met challenged any of this superstition. When you see Hindus in their religious setting their eyes seem to glaze over. It's almost like some form of possession.

Can you explain the place of the law in the Christian life – was it meant to be an instrument of justification? How does Paul see it?

It can't be an instrument of justification because it brings a curse to all who rely on it. It is only Christ who brings righteousness, blessing and life (3:10-14). The function of the law is to make us conscious of God's demands and our sin.

Paul likens the law to a guardian whose responsibility is to keep us safe until Christ comes to save us. Now that Christ has come the law's function has been fulfilled. Incidentally, this doesn't mean that the law is now irrelevant. It still serves to remind us of our sin and it functions as a guide to the revealed will of God. In a mysterious way, the law uncovers sin (Rom. 3:20), arouses sin (Rom. 7:5, 8) and restrains sinners (Gal. 3:12, 23). To restrain, remind and to make legally culpable belong in one category; however, to grant blessing and life belong in quite another. Timothy George compares the law to chemotherapy – it kills and is not able to confer life, but to the stricken cancer patient it is necessary for life.

Some people suggest that Paul is being relatively harsh when he says that those who rely upon the law are under a curse. How do you respond to that?

We get our theology wrong because we are morally wrong – we suppress the truth because of unrighteousness. Paul doesn't engage in theological controversy for the sake of it. He understands that people's souls and their eternal welfare are at stake. The reality is that you are cursed if you do not keep the whole law – so the law can't save you. God will not accept our moral imperfection, although unfortunately that's all we have to offer.

Paul says that Christ has been made a curse for us under the law. What does this imply about the nature of Christ's atoning work for us?

It implies that Christ's atonement is at least penal and substitutionary. Far more than physical pain and anguish were involved in Christ's death. The Saviour was paying off the debt that His sinful people owe to God (Col. 2:13-14).

We need to realise that we must be perfect or we perish (Gen. 2:17) – hence the need for Christ's work of substitution for us. To moralists, the notion of a crucified Messiah is repulsive. Modern liberal theologians tend to feel the same way. Leslie Weatherhead, for instance, calls this “butcher's shop theology”, which is one further indication as to why liberal theology should be treated as another gospel.

However, Paul teaches that when Christ “became a curse for us” (3:13) He satisfied the justice of God by taking upon Himself the pain of death and judgment so that we might know blessing and the glories of heaven. Luther says that “substitution is a sweet doctrine and full of comfort”. He goes on to say, “Therefore my dear brother, learn Christ and Him crucified; learn to pray to Him despairing of yourself, saying, ‘You, Lord Jesus, are my righteousness and I am Your

sin; You have taken on Yourself what you were not, and have given to me what I am not.’”

Sadly today, even among so-called evangelicals, there those who repudiate penal, substitutionary atonement. Tom Wright claims to be a prominent evangelical who has said that it is nonsense.

The Galatian heresy is always near at hand. We are all Pharisees at heart.

something that is replicated in every generation of the church?

The Galatian heresy is always near at hand. We are all Pharisees at heart. Although we might not be tempted to add the rite of circumcision to the gospel nowadays, there is a tendency in us all to add our own works in some form to the gospel message.

In today's church people find no difficulty adding things to the gospel. For instance, some people claim that you have to be baptized in a certain way to be saved;

others say that you have to speak in tongues. Some Christians place such an emphasis on discipleship and following Jesus that in a practical sense they lose the joy of free grace and justification. That's why we need to heed the message of Galatians. It keeps our eye on what's important and what is secondary or non-essential.

How do we explain the tendency of the Judaisers to always want to add to the free grace of the gospel? Is there something inherent in human nature that makes us want to do it?

As C. S. Lewis reminds us, pride is the biggest personal issue that most of us struggle with. We all love looking down on others. There's a moral basis for this; it's not simply intellectual. We love to justify ourselves and make out that we are better or more capable than we really are.

Then there's the problem of the devil. He's the father of lies. He is the great enemy of the church. If he doesn't persecute believers, then he'll distort or undermine the gospel message. That's the way he works. All through the book of Acts we see him using these two methods. He confuses people and leads them into error by either adding to the gospel or detracting from it.

ap

FROM THE MODERATOR – GENERAL IN REGARD TO CHURCH PLANTING IN PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

'The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for 1) the numerical growth of the Body of Christ in any city, and 2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches in a city. Nothing else – not crusades, outreach programmes, para-church ministries, growing mega-churches, congregational consulting, nor church renewal processes – will have the consistent impact of dynamic, extensive church planting.' (T. Keller)

Perth is currently growing at an unprecedented rate. People are moving to the Capital of Western Australia from all over Australia and the world. The West Australian General Assembly has developed a METRO-WIDE STRATEGY which seeks to respond to this growth and has as a key component, the planting and establishment of at least five new congregations. The West Australian General Assembly has declared that under the METRO-WIDE STRATEGY, the next area for church extension work will be in the Rockingham district, half an hour drive south of Fremantle on the coast. The Presbyterian Church in Western Australia is marshalling its own resources to launch a new effort in church planting but it also needs the help of the wider Presbyterian Church in this great task. (More details on the METRO-WIDE STRATEGY can be obtained from the Clerk of WA Assembly, Mr. Glenn Muskett on 08-9339 9400 ceo@braemarhomes.com.au)

I would invite you to pray especially for a suitable church planter to be raised up and for a suitable, committed and supportive core group to come together.

The 2007 General Assembly of Australia authorised the Moderator-General to coordinate an annual appeal during 2008, 2009 and 2010 to raise funds from across the Presbyterian Church of Australia to provide for the opening, staffing and development of a new church planting congregation in metropolitan Perth. The new church (the Lord willing) in the Rockingham district will be the recipient of the funds raised. Gifts can be sent to 'GAA WA Church Planting Appeal' c/- PO Box 2196, Strawberry Hills, NSW, 2012 with cheques made out to 'Presbyterian Church Funds'. A covering letter should state that the gift is for the 'WA Church Planting Appeal'. The GAA WA Church Planting Appeal will be placed before the Lord's people in our Church in a number of different forms.

Thank you for taking time to read this Communication. I would ask that we work together to ensure a very generous response to this call for gospel partnership with the Presbyterian Church in Western Australia.

ROBERT BENN, Moderator-General



The core belief

Jesus clearly taught justification by faith, the key doctrine to get right.

Many Christians today who embrace “the New Perspective on Paul” also propose a different view on the doctrine of justification by faith. They claim that when the text of Scripture is interpreted in the new light, Paul’s support for the principle of *sola fide* [by faith alone], the doctrine of imputation, and the distinction between law and gospel doesn’t seem quite so convincing.

We strongly disagree. We reject the historical and hermeneutical revisionism of the New Perspective, but regardless of how one interprets the apostle Paul, it’s quite clear that Jesus taught justification by faith alone. To abandon this truth is to abandon the biblical doctrine of salvation altogether.

No doctrine is more important to evangelical theology than the doctrine of justification by faith alone — the Reformation principle of *sola fide*. Martin Luther rightly said that the church stands or falls on this one doctrine.

History provides plenty of objective evidence to affirm Luther’s assessment. Churches and denominations that hold firmly to *sola fide* remain evangelical. Those who have strayed from the Reformation consensus on this point inevitably capitulate to liberalism, revert to some form of priesthood, embrace some form of perfectionism, or veer off into worse forms of apostasy.

Historic evangelicalism has therefore always treated justification by faith as a central biblical distinctive — if not the single most important doctrine to get right. This is the doctrine that makes authentic Christianity distinct from every other religion. Christianity is the religion of divine accomplishment — with the emphasis always on Christ’s finished work. All others are religions of human achievement. They become preoccupied, inevitably, with the sinner’s own efforts to be holy. Abandon the doctrine of justification by faith and you cannot honestly claim to be evangelical.

Scripture itself makes *sola fide* the only alternative to a damning system of works-righteousness: “Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who

**John
MacArthur**

does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness” (Rom. 4:4-5).

In other words, those who trust Jesus Christ for justification by faith alone receive a perfect righteousness that is reckoned to them. Those who attempt to establish their own righteousness or mix faith with works only receive the terrible wage that is due all who fall short of perfection. So the individual as well as the church stands or falls with the principle of



***This is the
doctrine
that makes
authentic
Christianity
distinct from
every other
religion.***

sola fide. Israel’s apostasy was rooted in their abandonment of justification by faith alone: “For not knowing about God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:3).

We must earnestly defend biblical justification on two fronts. People who say that the sinner only has to believe in Jesus as Saviour but not as Lord twist the doctrine of justification by faith to support the view that obedience to God’s moral law is optional. This teaching attempts to reduce the whole of God’s saving work to the declarative act of justification. It downplays the spiritual rebirth of regeneration (2 Cor. 5:17); it discounts the moral effects of the believer’s new heart (Ezek. 36:26-27); and it makes sanctification hinge on the believer’s own efforts. It tends to treat the

forensic element of justification — God’s act of declaring the believing sinner righteous — as if this were the only essential aspect of salvation. The inevitable effect of this approach is to turn the grace of God into licentiousness (Jude 4). Such a view is called “antinomianism”.

On the other hand, there are many who make justification dependent on a mixture of faith and works. Whereas antinomianism radically isolates justification from sanctification, this error blends the two aspects of God’s saving work. The effect is to make justification a process grounded in the believer’s own flawed righteousness — rather than a declarative act of God grounded in Christ’s perfect righteousness.

As soon as justification is fused with sanctification, works of righteousness become an essential part of the process. Faith is thus diluted with works. *Sola fide* is abandoned. This was the error of the Galatian legalists (cf. Gal. 2:16; 5:4). Paul called it “a different gospel” (Gal. 1:6, 9). The same error is found in virtually every false cult. It’s the main error of Roman Catholicism. I’m concerned that it may also be the direction many who are enthralled with “the New Perspective on Paul” are travelling.

If doctrine as a whole has been ignored in our day, the doctrine of justification has suffered a particular neglect. Written works on justification are noticeably missing from the body of recent evangelical literature. J. I. Packer made note of this in his introduction to the 1961 reprint of James Buchanan’s landmark work, *The Doctrine of Justification*: “It is a fact of ominous significance that Buchanan’s classic volume, now a century old, is the most recent full-scale study of justification by faith that English-speaking Protestantism (to look no further) has produced. If we may judge by the size of its literary output, there has never been an age of such feverish theological activity as the past 100 years; yet amid all its multifarious theological concerns it did not produce a single book of any size on the doctrine of justification. If all we knew of the church during the past century was that it had

neglected the subject of justification in this way, we should already be in a position to conclude that this has been a century of religious apostasy and decline."

Having neglected this doctrine for more than a century, evangelicals are ill-equipped to answer those who are saying Martin Luther and the Reformers misunderstood the apostle Paul and therefore got the doctrine of justification wrong.

The evangelical movement is on the verge of abandoning the material principle of the Reformation, and most evangelicals don't even see the threat and would have no answer cogent if they did.

What must we do to be saved? The apostle Paul answered that question for the Philippian jailer in the clearest possible terms: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Paul's key doctrinal epistles — especially Romans and Galatians — then expand on that answer, unfolding the doctrine of justification by faith to show how we are justified by faith alone apart from human works of any kind.

At least, that is the historic evangelical interpretation of Paul. But that's the very thing under attack by the New Perspective.

So what if we move beyond the apostle Paul? Is it possible to prove the principle of *sola fide* from the earthly teaching of Christ? It certainly is.

Although Christ gave no formal explanation of the doctrine of justification

(such as Paul did in his epistle to the Romans), justification by faith underlies and permeates all His gospel preaching. It is easy to demonstrate from Jesus' evangelistic ministry that He taught *sola fide*.

For example, it was Jesus Himself who stated, "he who hears My word, and believes ... has passed out of death into life" (Jn. 5:24) — without undergoing any

The tax-collector knew that even his best works were sin. He did not offer to do anything for God. He simply pleaded for divine mercy.



sacrament or ritual, and without any waiting period or purgatory. The thief on the cross is the classic example. On the most meager evidence of his faith, Jesus told him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Lk. 23:43). No sacrament or work was required for him to procure salvation.

Furthermore, the many healings Jesus accomplished were physical evidence of His power to forgive sins (Mt. 9:5-6). When He healed, He frequently said,

"Your faith has made you well" (Matt. 9:22; Mk. 5:34; 10:52; Lk. 8:48; 17:19; 18:42). All those healings were object lessons on the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

But the one occasion where Jesus actually declared someone "justified" provides the best insight into the doctrine as He taught it (Luke 18:9-14): He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

That parable surely shocked Jesus' listeners! They "trusted in themselves that they were righteous" (verse 9) — the very definition of self-righteousness. Their theological heroes were the Pharisees, who held to the most rigid legalistic standards. They fasted, made a great show of praying and giving alms, and even went further in applying the ceremonial laws than Moses had actually prescribed.

Yet Jesus had stunned multitudes by saying, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:20) — followed by, "You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (verse 48). Clearly, He set a standard that was humanly impossible, for no one could surpass the rigorous living of the scribes and Pharisees.

Now He further astounds His listeners with a parable that seems to place a detestable tax-gatherer in a better position spiritually than a praying Pharisee.

Jesus' point is clear. He was teaching that justification is by faith alone. All the theology of justification is there. But without delving into abstract theology, Jesus clearly painted the picture for us with a parable.

This tax-gatherer's justification was an instantaneous reality. There was no process, no time lapse, no fear of purgatory. He "went down to his house

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justified" (verse 14) — not because of anything he had done, but because of what had been done on his behalf.

Notice that the tax-collector understood his own helplessness. He owed an impossible debt he knew he could not pay. All he could do was repent and plead for mercy. Contrast his prayer with that of the arrogant Pharisee. The tax-collector did not recite what he had done. He knew that even his best works were sin. He did not offer to do anything for God. He simply pleaded for divine mercy. He was looking for God to do for him what he could not do for himself. That is the very nature of the penitence Jesus called for.

Furthermore, the tax-collector went away justified without performing any works of penance, without doing any sacrament or ritual, without any meritorious works whatsoever. His justification was complete without any of those things, because it was solely on the basis of faith. Everything necessary to atone for his sin and provide forgiveness had already been done on his behalf. He was justified by faith on the spot.

Again, he makes a stark contrast with the smug Pharisee, who was so certain that all his fasting and tithing and other works made him acceptable to God. But while the working Pharisee remained

unjustified, the believing tax-gatherer received full justification by faith alone.

Remember Jesus' statement from the Sermon on the Mount, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:20)? Yet now He states that this tax-collector — the most wicked of men — was justified! How did such a sinner obtain a righteousness that exceeded that of the Pharisee? If the standard is divine perfection (verse 48), how could such a traitorous person ever become just in God's eyes?

The only possible answer is that he received a righteousness that was not his own (cf. Phil. 3:9). Righteousness was imputed to him by faith (Rom. 4:9-11).

Whose righteousness was reckoned to him? It could only be the perfect righteousness of a flawless Substitute, who in turn must bear the tax-gatherer's sins and suffer the penalty of God's wrath

in his place. And the gospel tells us that this is precisely what Jesus did.

The tax-collector was justified. God declared him righteous, imputing to him the full and perfect righteousness of Christ, forgiving him of all unrighteousness, and delivering him from all condemnation. Forever thereafter he stood before God on the ground of a perfect righteousness that had been reckoned to his account.

Justification by faith is the very foundation of the gospel.

You cannot go wrong on this point without ultimately corrupting every other doctrine as well.

That is what justification means. It is the only true gospel. All other points of theology emanate from it. As Packer wrote, "The doctrine of justification by faith is like Atlas: it bears a world on its shoulders, the entire evangelical knowledge of saving grace." The difference between sola fide and every other formula for justification is not theological hair-splitting. A right understanding of justification by faith is the very foundation of the gospel. You cannot go wrong on this point without ultimately corrupting every other doctrine as well.

And that is why every "different gospel" is under the eternal curse of God.

Noted evangelical writer and minister John MacArthur is pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church.

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We need help with the law – and get it.

Dr Francis Macnab, minister of St Michael's Uniting Church in Melbourne, is currently busy advocating what he calls an evolving "New Faith" to replace the primitive religion of Bible-loving Christians. He regards Abraham as a concoction, Moses as a mass murderer and Jesus as very important but not necessarily the Son of God. He has put up hoardings such as "The Ten Commandments, The Most Negative Document Ever Written" which even brought the criticism of the Uniting Church Synod. One was glad to see an excellent positive statement of the Ten Commandments on a board erected by Scots Church immediately over the road.

While the great truths of the Christian faith are clear in the Scriptures, particularly the salvation wrought by Christ and the consequent gift of the Holy Spirit, not all passages are equally clear. The hard parts of Scripture can be to our advantage since they force us to engage heart and mind in a prayerful study of the difficult places.

To some, perhaps many, there are questions about the Old Testament and the law of Moses which included the Ten Commandments as an important element. Are we really still under these, you may ask? In this article I'd like to look at a major theme in Paul's letter to the Galatians, the theme of the place of the law.

Paul wrote to the Galatians around AD 49 because they were turning to a different gospel (1:7). The church in Galatia (in modern Turkey) was essentially a Gentile church but was being impacted by some of Jewish background. They were tempted to come under the law of Moses (4:21ff), and thought that the salvation they had obtained through believing in Christ needed to be completed by human effort (3:30).

It was being taught that it was necessary for salvation to keep Jewish practices, particularly circumcision. In this context (that concerning Timothy in Acts 16:3 was quite different and did not involve the nature of salvation) Paul regarded acceptance of circumcision as bringing one under obligation to observe the entire law of Moses (5:3), thus separating one from



**Rowland S.
Ward**

Christ (5:41) and bringing him or her under the law's curse (3:10). Indeed, he regards the earthly Jerusalem of his time as in slavery (4:25), and contrasts it with the spiritual Jerusalem which was free. How are we to understand all this?

We can set out the logic of Paul's teaching in Galatians 3:1-4:7 in this way:

3:1-5. The Galatian Christians had come to faith in Jesus Christ as crucified for them, and had received the Spirit so that they might live by the Spirit. By seeking to come under the Mosaic covenant they were making a fatal mistake since law observance does not secure the Spirit.

3:6-9. Abraham is the great example of the man who believed God and was reckoned righteous through his faith in God's promises (Gen. 15:6), and this before circumcision was given (Gen. 17). In fact, God said (Gen. 12) that all nations would be blessed in Abraham. God was saying that He would declare all righteous who had a faith like Abraham, and with the coming of Christ that wonderful promise is being realised. This means that God's international family is characterised by trust in God, not by keeping the law of Moses.

3:10-14. The previous conclusion is reinforced by the statement that there is no entry into God's family by obedience to the law of Moses, since any who seek to do so come under God's curse (Deut. 27:26) for failure to give the total obedience required. In the context this appears to mean that Israel, to whom the law of Moses was given, is now under God's

curse for her disobedience, so that any who seek to observe the law of Moses as necessary for salvation likewise come under that curse lying against the nation.

Indeed as God's disobedient people were about to experience the might of Babylon in conquest and exile, when she would not have temple or sacrifice, the prophet Habakkuk had stressed circa 620 BC that "the righteous by faith would live". Law obedience had never been the basis of getting right with God. The law demanded total obedience for one to have life, but could not enable such obedience. The Jews were therefore under its curse, but Christ had died bearing the curse of the law that was due. He had been treated as a covenant breaker and crucified, dying as both representative and substitute, so that believing Jew and Gentile might receive what Abraham had known, the Spirit received through faith – the heart of the promised blessing.

3:15-25. To further reinforce the case: Abraham received God's promises centuries before the law was instituted on Mount Sinai, so they cannot be set aside by the law of Moses or depend on obedience to that law. Further, God's promise was to Abraham and his seed/offspring. It was not a promise of more than one family, each with different requirements, but of one family collectively represented by Christ. Therefore the law of Moses, which established distinctions between Jew and Gentile had to go for God's promise to be fulfilled.

What, then, was the purpose of the law of Moses? It was a temporary supplement to the promise with a view to keeping Israel within bounds until the promised offspring came. Compared to what Christ the Son of God has brought, it is relatively inferior, being given merely by angels (Heb. 2:2) and through a mediator (Moses) and therefore was a covenant between two with conditions which Israel had not met. But God stood alone in giving his unconditional promise, so it is guaranteed. The law of Moses is therefore not opposed to the promises of God. The law could never give what faith in God's promises can. The law was only a guardian (*pedagogos*) to restrain sin and

teach spiritual lessons until the time of Israel's minority was complete and she could enter into her inheritance free from the supervision of the law.

3:26-4:7. It follows that every believer is a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ. There is only one family of God and ethnicity or social position has nothing to do with it: "you are all one in Christ Jesus." Rounding off the section, Paul returns to the points made in 3:1-5. Believers have entered into their inheritance because Christ has come, redeemed his people and given them the Spirit.

What must be stressed is that, as far as Paul is concerned, the old Mosaic covenant is finished. We are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6:14). We live in the time of the crucified and risen Lord and of the outpoured Spirit. So where does that leave the Ten Commandments which formed part of the law of Moses?

It is clear that Christ did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Mt. 5:17). The Mosaic covenant is superseded. The shadows of the Mosaic administration give way to the reality of Christ's saving work, for "the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth were realised through Jesus Christ" (Jn 1:17). Christ was "born under law to redeem those under law" (Gal. 4:5).

Yet we do not find the Ten Commandments being ignored in the New Testament church. Paul exhorts the children at Ephesus in terms of the fifth commandment (Eph. 6:3), and even notes (1 Cor. 11:30) that some believers at Corinth had died prematurely because they did not rightly honour fellow believers.

More generally, Paul stresses that "the righteous requirements of the law are fully met in us who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4). He insists that "the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Gal. 5:7), and that the entire law is summed up in the command of love (5:14).

These points can be reconciled when we recognise that the Ten Commandments were always special among the laws God gave to Israel. They were expressions of the law of love – what we sometimes call the moral law – that had existed from humanity's creation but were given to Israel in a form suited to her situation. Though the old Mosaic covenant is superseded, these ten words in their essence remain because they existed before Moses. They state what was and is

always humanity's obligation. While they can function to restrain sin, they cannot give power to obey. For sinners the way of law-keeping of any kind to attain salvation is hopeless, completely wrong-headed.

Salvation is possible for sinners only because of God's gift through Christ by the Spirit. It brings about a new creation, and freedom from the law's curse. The believer now is God's child and desires to express her/his faith through love. Believers do not receive the Ten Commandments from the hands of Moses, the mediator of a superseded covenant, but from the hands of Jesus, the mediator of the new and better covenant.

Their appreciation of them is deepened



The Ten Commandments state what was and is always humanity's obligation. While they can function to restrain sin, they cannot give power to obey.

through the positive exposition of them by Christ's obedience and in his own teaching and example (Mt. 5:17ff). Since they live by the Spirit they keep in step with the Spirit, showing the fruit of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23,25).

Appendix: Moral, ceremonial, civil? It is quite frequently suggested that the distinction between moral, ceremonial and civil laws of Israel made by the Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 19 is artificial since the law of Moses was a unified whole. However, the distinctions are perfectly appropriate if the analysis already given is maintained. Our Shorter Catechism rightly states that the moral law is summed up briefly in the Ten Commandments (#41) and recognises that the sum of the summary is the law of love (#42). The unique position of the moral law is also seen in the fact that:

- only the Ten Commandments were spoken by God's voice;
- they alone were accompanied by the shaking of Mount Sinai;
- they alone were written by His finger;
- they alone were written on enduring stone tablets rather than merely being writ-

ten in a book (Deut. 4:10-14; Ex 24:4); and

- they alone of the various laws were placed in the ark of the covenant (Deut. 10:5).

They formed the introduction to the Mosaic covenant, which expounds them in a manner appropriate for the people at that time (Deut. 6-26).

Of course they were also fully complete, the tablets being written on the front and the back, so that there was no room for other commandments of the same unique kind for there were none (Ex. 32:15); and

They were regarded as superior to the ceremonial law (eg. Ps. 51:16-19; Jer. 7; Amos 5).

It should also be remembered that the greatest commandment, on which depends everything else, is total love for the Lord (Matt 22:37 quoting the exposition of the first commandment in Deut. 6) and also love for one's neighbour – a command which, while explicit in a context of laws of different character, is a necessary corollary to the other given that humans bear the divine likeness (Lev. 19:18 cf. Matt. 7:12).

Hence, it follows that the Decalogue is a reflection, in a form suited to the historical situation of Israel, of the moral law, the law of love, written on Adam's heart at his creation.

Dr Rowland Ward is minister of Knox Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, in Wantirna, Vic.

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Letters

Unlikely story?

I have read with interest Mr Bernard Secombe's letter on the subject of guidance (*AP*, September). In it he refers to the Tay Bridge disaster of 1879 and the fortunate minister who felt impelled to leave the train at Dundee before the bridge collapsed.

It is an inspiring story, but as an old railway buff of Scottish descent I have to say that as it stands it is of somewhat doubtful validity. The train was actually travelling north from Edinburgh, not south towards it, and it fell into the River Tay before it ever reached Dundee, which is on the north side of the Tay. My source of information, John Prebble's book *The High Girders*, goes into considerable detail about the passengers but has nothing to say about a minister leaving the train before it entered on to the bridge.

*Ian Campbell
Epping, NSW*

Unlikely guide?

Regarding guidance, Bernard Secombe (*AP*, September) quotes the song "He walks with me and talks with me..." It makes me squirm. It must be interpreted allegorically. God talks through creation and the Word, and I in prayer.

Guidance is sought mainly for marriage and career. It is answered. It is best not to marry (Mt. 19:12) and "follow me... go and preach the kingdom of God" (Lk. 9:59). The apostles sought guidance by lot, not by audible voice. The lot fell but God answered in Paul.

God says: "The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord" (Prov. 16:1) and "O Lord I know that the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man who walks to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). Does God need to warn of impending disaster? If so, is it not to warn others?

Two men said to me, "We will go there and see what the Lord will have us do"; one unemployed for years, the other had hair to his waist. They did not need to go anywhere. God's will is plain. The first was work with his own hands (1 Thess. 4:11). The second was stop imitating a woman: "nature teaches that if a man has long hair it is a disgrace" (1 Cor. 11:14).

Always looking for guidance is contrary to faith and to His commands not to worry. Should the church be led by those hearing voices or those obeying the Word of God.

*Neil Cadman,
Norman Park, Qld*

Not hearing the Word

I am an old man, and I suffer from hearing loss. I do not think I am alone with this problem.

I have found that I frequently do not hear what the preacher has to say in my church, which is why I sometimes have nodded off. I wonder, what is your excuse? It embarrasses me. How about you?

I have some responsibility in this. I have two hearing aids but, just as it takes two to tango, it requires my and the preacher's co-operation for me to benefit from his teaching. Lip reading is usually something of a help: but one has to see the lips of the speaker. In conversation one-to-one it is a big help. But if the preacher is whispering to God in the public prayers, and God seems to be seated above the ceiling, and if a surreptitious glance gains no more than a look at his Adam's apple; then lip-reading does not help at all.

In spite of my heavy handed attempt at humour, this is a serious matter. In 1 Cor. 14:6, Paul refers to a similar situation with regard to speaking in tongues, and creates the precedent, that unless the hearers can understand what a preacher is saying, the exercise is worthless. If they choose not to listen, it is their responsibility; but to make it as understandable as he can, is the church's and his!

In this day of technology, the audio industry is so successful – witness the clarity of the radio and of sporting commentaries.

I am not asking that a preacher be required to swallow a microphone, but that he stand within the distance the microphone is designed to operate at. A bit of two-way assistance will help, I'm sure.

I do not want to ruffle feathers, in fact, I'm sorry if I have. But if anyone feels insulted or put-down, take a deep breath, look up Proverbs 27:6 and forgive me for being a silly old man.

*Laurie Miller,
Elder Emeritus
St Andrews Townsville, Qld*

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**20 daily Bible studies in
Matthew 8-10 and Proverbs 21**

We spent last month on the mountain with Jesus, soaking up and reflecting on His manifesto of what it means to belong to His Kingdom, to be a citizen of Heaven and to live by its code of ethics and behaviour. We share in this new society because of God's gracious work for us and in us through Christ, and not as a result of anything we have done, or are doing – or even because of any potential good things we might manage to do in the future. Paul went to great pains to remind the Galatian churches of this reality. Sadly, some of them were succumbing to the influence of people who said they had to add something, a contribution of their own, to Christ's finished work on the cross.

Over the last 2000 years the Church has struggled, more or less successfully, to resist this sort of influence. But it is a minefield. As Jesus comes down from the "mountain experience" of setting out what living as a citizen of His Kingdom looks like, He does demand something from those who would follow Him and claim to be part of His Kingdom and therefore inherit its blessings. He demands a definite response, a commitment of faith and obedience. But this must be kept in the right perspective: it is only ever a response to His gracious work and power. As soon as we start to think that somehow we are "earning" our salvation, that we are adding to what Jesus does, we are falling into the same trap as the Galatians.

As the studies this month challenge us to be better followers of Jesus, more loyal members of His Kingdom, let us remember that we are doing so because we are going to heaven, not so that we will go to heaven! **Bruce Christian ▶**

DAY 1**THE PASSAGE****MATTHEW 8:1-4**

THE POINT The leper exemplifies how we should approach God in prayer.

THE PARTICULARS

- The slow, relentless spreading effect of leprosy makes it an apt illustration of human sin. The detailed way it had to be dealt with under OT ceremonial law (cf Lev. 13-14), and the fact that it made one “unclean”, reinforce this imagery; it is therefore not without significance that the first person to confront Jesus when He came down from the mountainside was a leper (1-2).
- The leper expresses the problem most of us have with asking God for healing: we are in no doubt that He can do it, but we

DAY 2**THE PASSAGE****MATTHEW 8:5-13**

THE POINT The centurion provides another role model for pleading prayer.

THE PARTICULARS

- The centurion, though a Roman and not a Jew, recognised Jesus’ God-given power; and he therefore was humble enough to plead his desperate situation rather than demand anything from Him. Unlike the leper, his request was intercessory (on behalf of someone else); but he was no less earnest in it, which is all the more commendable since the sufferer was only his servant (6, 8).
- Jesus knows exactly what we need before we even ask (7, 13)!
- The essence of the centurion’s great faith was his recognition

DAY 3**THE PASSAGE****MATTHEW 8:14-17**

THE POINT Matthew wants us to see how the OT Scriptures point to Jesus.

THE PARTICULARS

- Claims by the Roman Catholic church that Peter (their 1st Pope) was unmarried, (like its assertion that Mary remained a virgin – cf 12:47), are contrary to God’s revelation in Scripture (14).
- The 2 healings we have seen so far were in response to people coming to Jesus; here Jesus Himself takes the initiative (14-15).
- As in the case of the leper, Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law by the touch of His hand (15); these contrast with the healing of the centurion’s servant where Jesus made a declaration with-

DAY 4**THE PASSAGE****MATTHEW 8:18-22**

THE POINT The Church today is so concerned about falling attendances, and so influenced by the marketing strategies of our time, that it will do anything to make the presentation of its “Good News” message more attractive and less confronting.

Because we live in a multi-faceted, multi-cultural, multi-ideological society, we feel obliged to offer different styles of worship at different times of the day and week so as to cause the least inconvenience or discomfort to as many people as possible. Are we surprised that this only seems to work in the short term, and that, in the end, we are not producing Kingdom people who fit the pattern Jesus set out in Matthew 5-7? Jesus shows us here how He went about the task of

Humility in prayer 101

are not so sure if it is really His will in our particular case (2).

- God became a man, not only to die for our sins, but to give us a glimpse of His character: He is both willing and able to meet all our needs. Jesus’ response to the leper’s trust is immediate (3).
- Jesus knew that His increasing popularity would attract the ire of the Jewish leaders; His “time” was not yet (4a; cf Jn 7:6).
- Jesus’ instruction in 4b reflects what He had said about the law in 5:17; the priests needed to know He was their true Messiah.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do you identify with the leper in this story, both in terms of recognising your need for cleansing, and of humility in prayer?

Humility in prayer 102

of who Jesus was, and His sovereign power over all creation (8-9). A renowned “man of prayer” was asked publicly the “Dorothy Dix” question: “Do you believe in the power of prayer?”, but his answer was as surprising as it was challenging: “No! I believe in the power of God; therefore I pray.” – a lesson for all of us!

- The Gentile’s exemplary faith was what God expected to see in His chosen people, but didn’t. This faith identified Him as a true Kingdom person and condemned the Jews as “outsiders” (10-12).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What is God teaching you about faith/prayer in this episode? Is such faith at the heart of your association with His Church?

The Divine Healer

out even seeing the man (13; cf 16). We should never limit God’s power to heal to any particular method, ritual or circumstance.

- Jesus was truly God’s Son – not only able to heal, but to drive out demons with full authority (16). This also shows that Satan has never been free to do whatever he likes (cf Job 2:1-6).
- Matthew is right in seeing Isaiah 53:4 fulfilled in Jesus’ healing ministry; but like many other Scriptures, the ultimate fulfilment is in the spiritual healing from sin’s power to condemn us (17).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are you convinced of Jesus’ true identity? Is this reflected in the way you trust Him with every aspect of your daily life?

Gospel Presentation 101

Church planting and Church revitalisation.

THE PARTICULARS

- The compelling power/authority of Jesus’ ministry is what attracted the crowds – Jesus Himself avoided the crowds (18).
- Jesus confronted even an enthusiastic “profession of faith” with a stern rebuttal and reminder of the cost of discipleship (19-20).
- Elsewhere Jesus stresses the importance of caring for family (cf 14f; John 19:25-27); the point He is making here is that serving Him cannot be postponed just to suit family convenience (21-22).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What would be involved in adopting Jesus’ approach today?

DAY 5**THE PASSAGE****MATTHEW 8:23-27**

THE POINT The “little-faith” of the disciples here contrasts with the “much” faith of the Roman centurion earlier (10). The comparison is heightened by the fact that the Gentile soldier had much less to go on than the disciples who had been constantly with Jesus.

THE PARTICULARS

- The topography of the area surrounding Galilee is such that violent storms can blow up without warning. This provides us with a good picture of life (viz the current financial crisis, or accidents or illnesses that impact our otherwise ordered lives).
- The disciples knew where to turn for help in the midst of their crisis (25), but Jesus’ response (26) indicates that their

urgent cry did not spring from hearts full of confidence in him (cf 8-10)! Their total panic is seen in the variance between how Matthew (26) and Peter (Mark 4:39-40) recollected the order of events!

- Jesus’ truly human nature is seen in His need for rest/sleep (24). His divine nature is now further demonstrated by His absolute control over the elements (26; cf Ps. 89:9, 107:23-32, etc). It’s no wonder the disciples asked, “What kind of man is this?” (27).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How long have you “walked” in the company of Jesus? Is your faith today more like that of the centurion – or of the disciples? What practical steps do we need to take to “increase” our faith?

DAY 6**THE PASSAGE****MATTHEW 8:28-34**

THE POINT The proclamation of the Gospel of God’s grace is a declaration of war against Satan and his forces. As Jesus pursued His path to the cross it is not surprising that Satan came out fighting.

THE PARTICULARS

- The region south-east of Galilee was Gentile territory and any Israelites who had settled there had become fully absorbed into the Greco-Roman culture of its “ten cities” (Decapolis). The farming of pigs was part of their natural economy (28, 30).
- Mark and Luke (both Gentiles) only mentioned 1 of the 2 demon-possessed men because, unlike Matthew, they focussed on that man’s being discouraged from staying with Jesus and

being sent as a witness to his own people (Mark 5:18-20, Luke 8:38-39).

- Even the demons recognised Jesus’ true identity, and, it seems, what He had come to achieve in God’s eternal Plan (29).
- In an age of Animal Rights it is easy to lose sight of the fact that God’s concern to rescue two of His image-bearers from eternal death far outweighs all other considerations; and the dramatic impact of the stampede as a demonstration of who Jesus is, more than compensates for the cost to the pigs or porcine industry.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Have we lost perspective on the intensity of spiritual warfare?

DAY 7**THE PASSAGE****MATTHEW 9:1-8**

THE POINT Although man can only be cured of spiritual blindness by God’s gracious initiative, he has no excuse for it. The Jews rejected the Messiah in the face of clear, irrefutable evidence: only God can forgive sins; Jesus gives proof that He can forgive sins; therefore Jesus is God (cf the similar syllogism regarding the blind man in John 9: only God can give sight; etc). We are all without excuse if we persist in unbelief (cf Acts 17:31; Rom. 1:20, 2:1, 3:19).

THE PARTICULARS

- With Jesus back “home” after the intense battle with demons on “foreign” soil, Matthew wants to emphasise the total spiritual blindness of the Jewish religious leaders. He therefore

doesn’t give us the details of how the sick man’s (four) friends showed the extent of their faith in getting to Jesus (Mk 2:4, Lk 5:19), or even why what Jesus said was considered blasphemy (Mk 2:7, Lk 5:21), but goes straight to the heart of the controversy.

- The man’s paralysis may or may not have been a direct result of a particular sin of his, although Rabbinic theology would have declared it was, and therefore they were trapped by their own assumptions! The one central point Jesus was making was that his deepest need was not for physical, but for spiritual healing.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Why is the “home crowd” still focussing on Jesus’ humanity (8)?

The heart of the problem**DAY 8****THE PASSAGE****MATTHEW 9:9-13**

THE POINT Levi (cf Mark 2:14, Luke 5:27), the despised Jewish traitor who collected taxes for the Roman “opposition”, was converted as a result of Jesus graciously seeking him out.

The change probably inspired him to change his name to Matthew (“gift of God”). As one of the Twelve he had many opportunities to see first-hand how Jesus the Son of God reached out to, and associated with, the very people the religious leaders spurned; he knew what it meant to be a sick person made well, “a sinner saved by grace”.

THE PARTICULARS

- The “born again” “Matthew” avoided using his “old” name, Levi.
- Unlike many other cases where people came to Jesus, in this

case the Saviour made the first move – He “chose” Matthew (9).

- Matthew was most effective as a witness immediately after his conversion while he still had many “non-Christian” mates (10).
- Jesus made it quite clear that the essential first step in turning to Him is recognising that one is a lost sinner who needs a Saviour. Sadly, there are church-going “Christians”, who are depending on their good works “sacrifice”, but have never taken this step – seeking God’s mercy and taking hold of His salvation (12-13).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Does all you say and do depict you as a “sinner saved by grace”?

The heart of the Gospel

DAY 9***A life-giving Gospel*****THE PASSAGE****MATTHEW 9:14-17**

THE POINT The OT principle Jesus used to show why He ate with outcasts and sinners (13; Hosea 6:6) is now applied by the question of ceremonial fasting. The “old” religion of Judaism had reduced God’s life-giving Word to a burdensome, lifeless outworking of ritual observance. He had come to bring that very “Life” God had always intended for His people (cf John 10:10), and for this to have its proper impact it could not be mixed with anything that reeked of the old ways. Yes, there will be testing times for His Church when His followers feel deserted, as David often did in his psalms, and then prayer and fasting will be appropriate and almost unavoidable (hopefully without falling into the “dry ritual” pothole!); but for

now, while He was there among them, their focus was to be on celebration, rejoicing, Life!

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus used clear, everyday, practical examples to show how the Good News He was bringing was not only incompatible with the dead orthodoxy of Rabbinic Judaism (itself an utter travesty of the OT – cf 5:21ff), but it was quite disastrous to try to mingle the two together (eg as in the Galatian controversy!) (16-17).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are you rejoicing as Christ’s Bride, longing for His coming? Is there any part of your life that might tend towards legalism?

Distractions**DAY 10****THE PASSAGE****MATTHEW 9:18-26**

THE POINT This is an interesting snapshot of Jesus’ ministry to help us keep things in perspective as we serve Him. The sovereign Lord had everything under control. Although even a second’s delay might have irritated the poor anxious ruler, Jesus’ ministry to others included the unscheduled interruptions as much as the plans.

THE PARTICULARS

- Matthew’s account is much briefer than Mark’s (5:22-43) or Luke’s (8:41-56). For example, he doesn’t mention that when the (synagogue) ruler (Jairus) first approached Jesus his daughter was still desperately hanging onto life and only died during the delay; nor does he report on Jesus’ being aware of the

woman’s touch and then having to go to some pains to locate her. Yet the essential message is there: the ruler’s overt, unshakeable faith (Matthew implies that he would have come even if his daughter had already died); the woman’s firm but lowly faith (cf 8:2); Jesus’ power, sensitivity, compassion and absolute authority.

- Jesus knew that He had come to conquer death and cancel out its power over us; He could therefore refer to it as just “sleep” (24), which is how we should look at it (cf 1 Thess. 4:14).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are you able to keep trusting Jesus regardless of what He sends your way? Do you see His hand at work in the “interruptions”?

Grace, faith and healing**DAY 11****THE PASSAGE****MATTHEW 9:27-34**

THE POINT In the sum of all Jesus’ healings there is a tension concerning the relationship between faith and grace. Sometimes the healing is totally dependent on the faith of the recipient, sometimes it quite clearly isn’t (eg Luke 7:12-15) and sometimes the question is left open. This same “logic” lies behind Paul’s classic statement: “By grace you have been saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). The Church has wrestled with this tension forever, even from before the time of Calvin and Arminius! Let us keep it all in perspective.

THE PARTICULARS

- The appeal of the 2 blind men to Jesus as “the Son of David” is significant: they were recognising Him as the promised Messiah

who would “open eyes that are blind” (cf 11:2-6; Is. 42:7) and therefore were in no doubt as to the outcome (27-28). In fact, it was their faith that contributed to their healing (29; cf 13:58).

- Jesus told the healed men to be silent, yet they quickly “spread the news” (31). Sadly, for us it is often the other way around!
- This particular man’s inability to speak resulted from demon-possession. Jesus again proves His unique power over demons; the man’s subsequent speaking convinced the crowd (32-33).
- For the stupidity of the Pharisees’ conclusion (34), see 12:25-28.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How many others have you told about God’s grace in your life?

Ask the Lord of the harvest**DAY 12****THE PASSAGE****MATTHEW 9:35-38**

THE POINT In today’s dry spiritual climate in Australia we need to take the Lord’s word for it that “the harvest is plentiful”! The situation, however, was no different when Jesus made this statement. His society was about to crucify Him and persecute His followers, but in a couple of years, on the Day of Pentecost, 3,000 of them would turn to Him in repentance and faith and be baptised. We do not know when the Spirit of God might be pleased to move!

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus knew what His Father required of Him and was committed to an extensive preaching/healing ministry. A world impaired and darkened by sin needed to be healed and taught if

it was to become His Kingdom reflecting His nature and character (35).

- Man’s rebellion in the Fall, and its consequences for the whole of Creation, has provided the backdrop against which God can show the fulness of His love/mercy/compassion. Our “lostness” is endemic and renders us completely helpless; we are literally “like sheep without a shepherd” – and God cares about us (36).
- God tells us there are more people out there waiting to hear and believe the Good News of His grace than there are bearers of it; He is waiting for us to make this an urgent prayer item (37-38).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How urgent is your missionary/ministry praying at present?

Motley Crew, miraculous curers**DAY 13****THE PASSAGE****MATTHEW 10:1-4**

THE POINT God's Word tells us accurately what Jesus did in a particular time and place for a specific band of 12 twelve men to achieve a definite result; the fact that He takes the opportunity to give us their names localises the event. We are not to derive from this the idea that we have been given His authority to do these things whenever we feel inclined (eg 1; cf 8); God continues to work in different ways at different times through the ministry of His Church, often fulfilling His purposes through sickness and death.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus had already proved conclusively His authority to equip His disciples with power over demonic forces and illness (1).

DAY 14**THE PASSAGE****MATTHEW 10:5-15**

THE POINT There's great urgency about the Gospel (cf 2 Corinthians 6:1-2).

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus' first concern was for the Jews, God's chosen people who had come back from Exile in Babylon over 500 years earlier; and His concern was because He knew they were now lost (6).
- His message to them was urgent; if he, their promised King, had now arrived on the stage of history, the window of opportunity for repentance and faith was therefore limited (7). This urgency was to be conveyed by the whole approach of the disciples (in this case they were being sent as "apostles") to their task (9-14).

DAY 15**THE PASSAGE****MATTHEW 10:16-23**

THE POINT Jesus now goes from specific details applicable to the disciples' immediate mission to include more general principles that will apply in every age. He was fully aware of the danger involved in proclaiming His Good News to a lost but hostile world, and of the unpleasant and demanding consequences of obeying Him.

THE PARTICULARS

- Because of the unlevel playing field (sheep vs wolves), we need to balance our godly sincerity with a measure of cunning (16)!
- As they were with Jesus, our opponents will be merciless, using every available official channel to prevent our witness

DAY 16**THE PASSAGE****MATTHEW 10:24-33**

THE POINT Many things that have happened, and are happening, in Church history are confusing as we see widespread, intense and brutal persecution. Sometimes it appears that Satan is having a field day: not only are Christians being physically abused, but their message is being misinterpreted, misrepresented, and purposely discredited; there is confusion in people's minds to the extent that even believers are left bewildered – the events don't square with the fact that Jesus has already conquered Satan through His death and resurrection (cf 1 Corinthians 15:20-28) and now rules over all things in heaven (cf Ephesians 1:18-23). Jesus reassures us here that all this is within the outworking of God's purposes in history, and that

- The names of "the Twelve" are listed in four places in Scripture (cf Mark 3:16, Luke 6:14, Acts 1:13). Simon Peter is at the top of each list while Andrew, James and John occupy the next 3 spots but in different orders; Philip is always fifth; Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew are always the next 3 (in varying order); James the son of Alphaeus is always ninth; Simon the Zealot is put ahead of Thaddaeus/Judas son of James in Luke/Acts; and Judas Iscariot is always last (and obviously absent in Acts).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What is Jesus teaching us by using a disparate band of ordinary men to do amazing things? ... and by including Judas?

Now is the Day of Salvation

- The disciples' authority even to "raise the dead" (8) is extra to what was mentioned in verse 1; it is clear that we have here a very special historical case, not God's usual modus operandi.
- Kingdom workers have the right to live off the Gospel if they are conscientiously occupied by it (9-10; cf 1 Timothy 5:17-18).
- Unlike Jesus' own patient mentoring of His disciples, this was not to be the time/place for "relationship evangelism" (11-14).
- The whole world is under God's judgement; showing contempt for His offer of salvation brings even greater condemnation (15).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do we really see our God-given task of evangelism as urgent?

Testing times ahead

(17-18); and they will be from unexpected (and unsettling!) places (21).

- Jesus reminds us that God is our Father, therefore we can trust Him to help us respond, through His Spirit, to all the inevitable persecution we will face – in both word and action (19-20).
- We must always stand firm in our faith/commitment, even if at times it is more shrewd/strategic to flee and regroup (22-23).
- Jesus' reference in verse 23 is to His death (cf John 12:30-34).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What aspects of Jesus' teaching here do we see operating in our own society? Do you think opposition is increasing? Are we prepared for what might happen to us, as it is in, say, Africa?

God knows what's happening

what many experience is entirely consistent with His own experience on the way to the cross. As the resurrection changed His disciples' perspective, so will His Second Coming in power make all things perfectly clear (26)!

THE PARTICULARS

- A hostile world will always treat us as it treated Jesus (24-25).
- We should not let misinterpretation or false accusations stop us from speaking out; God's truth must prevail in the end (26-27).
- Ultimately, we need only fear God. Our whole eternal being is in His hands: safely if we continue to acknowledge Him in the face of opposition; but for final rejection if we don't (28-33).

DAY 17**THE PASSAGE****MATTHEW 10:34-39**

THE POINT One of the excuses many people use for rejecting Christianity is that Jesus promised to bring world peace, but the opposite seems to be the case – and some of the world's bloodiest conflicts have left His Church holding the smoking gun. Jesus knew that Satan would not take his inevitable defeat lying down, doing as much damage to the Church as he could on his way to his demise (cf Revelation 12). The redemption of His Elect, therefore, cannot be without bitter conflict, so Jesus warns His disciples in advance.

THE PARTICULARS

- In a sinful world, peace is never possible without conflict. Jesus came, not to condemn but to save (John 3:17); but He cannot save believers without condemning unbelievers (John

3:18)! We must see His claims in verses 34-36 in a similar light (cf 13; John 14:27).

- The situation we are all in is so serious that we must put Jesus' claim on us ahead of every other consideration. Thankfully, our family ties mostly enhance our walk with Him and our serving of Him; but if they don't, He makes it clear what comes first (37).
- "Taking up my cross" means surrendering to Jesus every claim on my life, giving Him full control of every part of it; this is what His own cross meant to Him in terms of His Father's will (38-39).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Have you "lost your life", "taken up your cross" to follow Jesus?

*Just a cup of cold water***DAY 18****THE PASSAGE****MATTHEW 10:40-42**

THE POINT Just as we identify with Jesus in His cross (38-39), so we can identify with Him in His ministry through us (cf Galatians 2:20). "[The disciples'] reward will be great, precisely because they have looked for no reward. Similarly, all who welcome them into their homes will not go unrequited, for in welcoming them, whether they know it or not, they will be welcoming Jesus who sent them, and in welcoming Jesus, they will be welcoming the Father who sent Him into the world to be His Apostle (40). The smallest act of service to the most insignificant of Christ's disciples will be rewarded as though it had been rendered to Christ Himself." [Tasker] Jesus challenges us with this in 25:31-46.

THE PARTICULARS

- Ministry is never to be an isolated, one-man-band activity; as we identify with others in the work they are doing (ie "receive" them – perhaps it might be just praying for a missionary), so God will see us as part of their work, and will therefore see that we share in its blessing. We discover the reality of this in the doing.
- Handing out cups of water to fellow-believers (42) cannot earn God's favour in an absolute sense: we are saved by grace alone. But by such actions we demonstrate that we truly belong to Him.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do you pray for Christians for whom persecution is a reality?

*GPS for life***DAY 19****THE PASSAGE****PROVERBS 21:1-16**

THE POINT The simple logic of God's justice, built into the way He made us, should be enough to guide us; but sin has blinded us to the truth.

THE PARTICULARS

- It would make a big difference to our world if all its leaders acknowledged that they are only instruments in God's hands (1).
- Post-modern man is defining right and wrong to suit himself, led by the "light" of his own proud, sinful heart. Even then, he only superficially does what is "right"; but he forgets that it is God alone who sets the exam paper of life – and marks it (2-4)!
- Our present financial crisis bears out the truth of verses 5-6!

• God has designed us with a conscience which is sufficient to condemn the guilty and acquit the innocent (7-8). But by ignoring our conscience we silence its voice (10), and will finally suffer the consequences, in this life (12-13, 15), and beyond (16).

- Harmony in the home far outweighs the value of the house (9)!
- Punishing those who try to mislead others serves to warn the gullible, hopefully moving them to greater understanding (11).
- Verse 14 doesn't condone bribery, but Jacob made good use of its wisdom when he was going to meet Esau (cf Gen. 32:20).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Why is the Bible so important and necessary as a guide to life?

*A reflection on our society?***DAY 20****THE PASSAGE****PROVERBS 21:17-31**

THE POINT Here is a further check-list to assess the health of our society.

THE PARTICULARS

- The West is now starting to reap the fruit of hedonism (17, 20).
- We should not be surprised when things go well for those who model their lives on God's wisdom; those who trust in human schemes and structures will eventually suffer loss (18, 21-22).
- A home without harmony is of no use or value as a house (19)!
- Careless speech (or the impulsive use of emails/text messaging) can get us into all sorts of trouble (23; cf James 3:1-12).

• Because God is the Creator and we are His handiwork, made in His image, pride and self-confidence are a form of mockery (24).

- Greed is destroying the very fabric of Western society (25-26).
- Dishonesty and superficiality contribute to the breakdown of a society; it is honesty in the heart that really matters (27-29).
- Our society's approach to climate change and the financial crisis, ignoring God's Word and the reality of divine judgement, shows how little we understand where things are heading (30-31).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How many of the above points are particularly relevant to our current situation? Are we always careful to avoid the pitfalls?



Across Australia

Planting vision shared

The Rev. David Jones of Crossroads Presbyterian Church, Hobart, visited Trinity Theological College in Perth in late August for a special ministry day. He spoke of church planting efforts in Tasmania.

"Hobart is home to about 200,000 people. Vision 100 (wwwvision100.org) came into existence in the year 2000. It began as a joint Presbyterian and Reformed ministry to reach the city of Hobart. The vision was to see 10% of the population under the gospel," he said.

"We worked out that would require 100 new churches in Hobart. Since then the vision has spread to the rest of the state. It has evolved into a network of churches and para-church ministries co-operating together to reach Tasmania for Christ."

Since 2000 two Presbyterian churches (Crossroads and Cornerstone) have been planted in Hobart as well as three Christian Reformed churches (Bay, One Way and Summerleas). Another Presbyterian plant started this year.

Next year the Rev. Campbell Markham of the Kingsley (Westminster) Presbyterian Church is to spend a year working with David Jones, with a view to returning to Perth to initiate a similar church planting movement.

Fruit for PIM

In the middle of June, Clive and Doreen Griffiths of the Scots Church, Fremantle, WA, offered their services to the Presbyterian Inland Mission as volunteers and went up to the small gold

mining town of Mt Magnet to look after the church properties PIM recently bought from the Anglican Diocese of North West Australia.

Through strong relationship skills, gradually good gospel contacts have been made with people in the town. An area of ministry that has emerged as a potentially fruitful one is with the large number of holiday makers who pass through Magnet on the way to the Pilbara. After solving a number of technical issues, 88 FM, the local Christian radio station, is sending out its broadcasts again from the church building right across the town and immediate district.

Service for Victorian moderator

The opening service and induction of the incoming Victorian moderator Douglas Robertson at last month's Victorian Assembly had a strong Presbyterian Ladies College flavour, as among his many responsibilities the Scots' Church chief minister is chairman of PLC School Council. The service featured choral items from both the Scots' Church choir and the PLC Choir.

Presbyterian Church of Australia Moderator-General Robert Benn spoke to the assembly twice, on his work as Moderator-General and in support of WA moderator designate Bill McRae. The 2007 GAA authorised the Moderator-General to coordinate an annual appeal during 2008, 2009, and 2010 to raise funds from across the PCA to provide for a new church plant in the Rockingham (south of Perth) district.

Other "guests" were the Rev. Bill Lutton, APWM national director, PLC principal Mrs Elaine Collin, Mr Ron Lyons, who addressed the assembly on Presbyterian gospel ministry in far north Queensland, and Elspeth Slater, welcomed home to "retirement" by the moderator.

Boost for college principal

The assembly approved extending the appointment of Presbyterian Theological College principal Douglas Milne beyond his 65th year to the end of 2011; it also reappointed Dr Greg Goswell as lecturer in Biblical Studies (Hebrew and Old Testament) until retirement and elevated the Rev. Dr Felix Chung from part-time to full-time as lecturer in missiology.

The assembly decided to hold the 2009 assembly in Ballarat, having resolved some years ago to meet in a rural area every five years. This will be the fourth time the assembly has met outside the metropolitan area (Hamilton, 1995, Benalla, 2000, and Warrnambool, 2005).

Double anniversaries

The Victorian assembly marked the 50th anniversary of the ordination of two of its long-standing members: the Rev. Keith Allen (retired from parish ministry, but still active in his presbytery and in the assembly), and Elder Keith Pretty, who has spent the whole of his 50 years as an elder in the congregation of Drouin. Certificates were presented to both men to mark the occasion.

The assembly also noted the passing of four of its ministerial members during the past year — David Innes, Edward (Ted) Pearson, Allan Lendon and Dr J. Graham Miller. The assembly approved memorial minutes for each of these men.

Duncan star turn

The PCV 150th Anniversary Committee reported that the guest speaker at the special service for the Victorian church's 150th anniversary next April will be the Rev. Dr Ligon Duncan III, senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church, in Jackson, Mississippi, one of

Wynnum on Morton Bay Charge Qld

will be becoming Vacant in late 2009.

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the largest congregations of the Presbyterian Church in America. The committee also hopes to make good use of Dr Duncan for the few days he can be in Australia by arranging a ministry conference on Friday 3 April.

Religious freedom survey

The Australian Human Rights Commission, Australia's national, independent statutory authority which administers Commonwealth human rights laws, has commissioned the Australian Multicultural Foundation, (AMF) in association with RMIT University and Monash University to prepare a report on *Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century*.

All members of the public are invited to submit a response and details are available at www.humanrights.gov.au/frb. Many Christians have often been suspicious that religious freedoms might be curtailed in the name of equal rights – a claim widely made about the Victorian Racial and Religious Tolerance Act – so it is important for their voice to be heard on this issue.

Advocate for persecuted church

Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, the International Director of the Barnabas Fund (barnabasfund.org) was the speaker at a Breakfast held at Bassendean, WA, on 8

September. Dr Sookhdeo, an Anglican minister, is also the director of the Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity and an outspoken spokesman for persecuted Christian minorities around the world.

Koreans carry out repairs

A work party from the Perth Korean congregation led by the Rev. Sung-Tae Kim performed some urgent maintenance work on the "new" (actually nearly 100 years' old) Presbyterian Church building in Meekatharra at the start of September. More than \$4000 of paint, food, fuel and other equipment was donated by the Perth Korean congregation, local businesses and private individuals. The local Uniting Church kindly supplied free accommodation as well.

New interns for Leederville

Kazu and Akemi Furukawa have arrived to spend a two-year pastoral internship with the Rev. Steve Young at the Leederville, WA, congregation. Kazu became a believer about four years ago at Teen Challenge in Esperance. He is helping Steve in many ways while trying to improve his English. Eventually Kazu would like to return to Japan and open a drug and substance rehabilitation centre in partnership with the Presbyterian Church of Japan.



Around the World

On the buses

Britain's first atheist advertising campaign – slogans on the side of London buses – was launched last month with the support of anti-religion campaigner Richard Dawkins.

The slogan on the buses will read: "There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life." The Atheist Bus Campaign began with an online column on the *Guardian* by comedy writer Ariane Sherine in June after she saw Christian ads on London buses featuring a website which said non-Christians would burn in hell for all eternity. Sherine suggested that atheists reading her article could each donate £5 (\$A13) to fund a "reassuring counter-advert".

Hundreds of readers offered to contribute to the proposed ad. The British Humanist Association undertook to administer donations for the campaign and Richard Dawkins – who is a multimillionaire, and has recently helped launch a Tory humanist group – agreed to match all donations up to a maximum of £5500, giving the campaign a total of £11,000 if the full amount is raised. This is enough for two sets of 30 buses carrying the atheist slogan across Westminster for four weeks, say campaigners.

CBS Outdoor, the bus advertising company, have said that they will run the ads in January.

Ekklesia

Church turned into synagogue

For the first time in Germany, a Protestant church has been turned into a Jewish synagogue. The consecration of the synagogue, called Beit Tikwa (House of Hope), in the town of Bielefeld, took

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place on 21 September. The Rev. Alfred Buss of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, where Bielefeld is located, said the new place of worship is also a "house of hope" for Protestants.

Buss recalled "with sorrow and deep shame" the destruction of Bielefeld's former synagogue on 9 November 1938, known as **Kristallnacht** or Night of Broken Glass, when Nazis attacked synagogues and other Jewish property throughout Germany. The Evangelical Church of Westphalia had failed in the face of the Holocaust, when 6 million Jews were killed, said Buss, the president of the Westphalian church.

The synagogue was needed because the previous location, dating from the 1950s, had become too small. The Jewish community in the region has grown in recent years because of the arrival of immigrants from eastern Europe.

Ekklesia

Copts persecuted

An Egyptian Coptic Christian woman has been sentenced to three years in prison for failing to uphold her Islamic identity – an identity she didn't know she had for more than four decades. Sisters Shadia and Bahia Nagy El-Sisi, both in their late 40s and residents of the small east Delta town Mit-Ghamr, were arrested and tried for claiming their official religious identity as Christian. Unknown to them, their religious identity changed 46 years ago due to their father's brief conversion to Islam. Both are illiterate.

Shadia El-Sisi was tried for stating her religion as Christian on her marriage certificate and sentenced to three years in prison last November. She was released two months later. In September a judge also sentenced Bahia El-Sisi to three years in prison for "forging" her marriage certificate by stating her religion as Christian. Their father, Nagy El-Sisi, converted to Islam in 1962 during a brief marital dispute in order to divorce his wife and potentially gain custody of his daughters, the sisters' lawyer Peter Ramses told Compass. Egyptian law is influenced by

Islamic jurisprudence (*sharia*), which automatically awards child custody to whichever parent has the "superior" religion and dictates "no jurisdiction of a non-Muslim over a Muslim".

Compass Direct

Iran releases "apostates"

Iranian officials have released two Christian converts who were being held in prison on apostasy charges, one week after the Iranian Government voted overwhelmingly in favour of new legislation to introduce the death penalty for anyone who leaves the Muslim faith.

Mahmoud Mohammed Matin-Azad, 53, and Arash Ahmad-Ali Basirat, 40, were arrested in May and charged with apostasy following their conversion to Christianity from Islam.

Andy Dipper, head of Christian persecution watchdog **Release International**, gave a cautious welcome to news of their release. "We're delighted Iran has dropped its charges against these men but existence is about to become even tougher for other Iranians seeking freedom of faith," he said.

Christian Today

Challenge over disabled

British Churches have been accused of "questioning God's creativity within people with disabilities". The claim comes from Aman Lee, who is autistic and suffers from a speech impediment. He told a Manchester conference last month that churches can and must become fully inclusive of people with learning disabilities.

Organised by **Prospects for People with Learning Disabilities** (Prospects), a national Christian charity specialising in the support and spiritual development of people with learning disabilities, the "**Creative God, Creative People**" event in Manchester on 18 October marked the start of a nationwide campaign by the charity to help change attitudes within churches to the gifts and value of disabled people.

Mr Lee told church leaders: "We see that God created the universe, yet we

question his creativity within people with disabilities – it is like killing part of God. Killing the very being that created in the first place. We need to challenge some of our churches to take the veils off. God despairs when he sees part of his body, destined to be givers, shut out of His house."

Event organiser David Bendor-Samuel said: "There are between 1.4 and 1.5 million people in the UK with learning disabilities and yet very few are to be found in our churches.

Christian Today

Hand-written NIV

One of the world's largest Bible publishers is enlisting the help of more than 31,000 Americans to hand write their next edition of the Bible.

Commemorating the 30th anniversary of the popular **New International Version** translation, Zondervan is travelling to 90 cities in 44 states to allow people to write a verse in the new NIV Bible.

"The Bible is America's favourite book of all time. And because of its accuracy, clarity and literary quality, the NIV has become the most successful Bible translation of all time," said Zondervan president Moe Girkins. There are more than 300 million copies in print worldwide.

The collection of handwritten verses, each written by 31,173 contributors on actual thin-stock Bible paper, will be published as a complete America's NIV Bible and sold in stores next year.

Christian Post

Africans pursue Great Commission

Hundreds of African Christian leaders gathered in Nairobi last month to develop strategies on how to complete the Great Commission. The second **Call2All Congress** – the first in Africa – held five days of sessions, presentations, and prayers from 14 to 18 October, attended by about 60 senior pastors and bishops and 40 professionals from different sectors of society.

Delegates came from surrounding East African countries such as Uganda,

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Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan.

Bishop Kabachia, the regional coordinator of Movement for Africa National Initiatives (MANI), said a recent research project on the number of unreached people groups in Kenya sparked a challenge to Christians that resulted in every tribe in Kenya being engaged with the Gospel.

Christian Today

Pakistani pastor threatened

A Pakistani pastor and his family in Punjab province have been living in fear for months after death threats from a murder suspect and repeated attacks on their house by police squads. Pastor Christopher Manzer, 55, of Jhugian Baja Singh, reported that a Muslim man, Mohammad Nawaz, blames him for the loss of his wife as the pastor counseled her after she returned to her father having regretted converting to Islam.

Manzer said Nawaz has enlisted extremist Muslim groups to mount a wave of attacks on him. "I'm a Christian pastor, and in Pakistan you know it is a trend to hurt the Christians," Manzer said. "Most Christians are suffering very much."

Nawaz's uncle, wanted in connection with the murders of two Christian men in the past three months, has called the pastor twice telling him to leave town or die. At the same time, officers from different police stations have beaten Manzer on five occasions.

Compass Direct



On the Agenda

Credit crunch hits diet

By Jenna Lyle

The credit crunch is having a knock-on negative effect on people's diets, a British specialist debt counselling charity has warned. Christians Against Poverty said just under a third of Britain's population were eating less healthily than last year as soaring food prices and the ongoing financial crisis forces people to make cuts in their spending.

A YouGov poll commissioned by CAP found that 32 per cent of the 2000 respondents had turned to cheap, processed foods in a bid to save money.

The survey also found that more than half – 53 per cent – of the UK's population believe their finances are now in a worse state than this time last year with one in five of those respondents saying they were much worse.

The financial crisis threatens to derail government efforts to improve the nation's diet with nearly half of all 35 to 44-year-olds confessing that their diet had deteriorated in the last 12 months.

CAP has issued its top 10 tips on how to cut back on food costs whilst maintaining a healthy diet. The charity has also posted recipes that can feed a family of four for \$A10 on its website.

Nearly half of all the 2,057 respondents – 48 per cent – stated that they had not let food price increases affect their diet, but admitted that their budgets had been really stretched to get around the price hike.

CAP said it was worried that these people would soon be forced to make changes for the worse to their diet in order to avoid falling into debt if food and fuel prices continue to rise.

Christian Today

Indian PM defends Christianity

By Jennifer Gold

Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh attempted to reassure Christians of their place in India when he met the head of the World Council of Churches last month.

"Christianity is part of our national heritage," Dr Singh told WCC General Secretary Samuel Kobia.

Dr Kobia told reporters after the meeting that he was "extremely pleased" to hear this assertion from the Prime Minister, according to a WCC report.

The Indian Government has come under fire for its handling of a wave of attacks on Christians in Orissa state and other parts of the country, triggered by the killing of a Hindu leader in August.

The government was criticised for failing to prevent Hindu extremists from going on the rampage in the last few months, killing at least 54 Christians and burning down Christian homes, churches and schools. Tens of thousands of Christians were forced to flee from their homes to makeshift camps and forests.

"I conveyed to the prime minister the international Christian community's concern over the situation in Orissa and other areas," Dr Kobia later told the media.

"We want the government to guarantee peace in order to instil confidence so that Christians may return to their villages and live there without fear," he said.

Dr Singh said the government was working to "restore normalcy" and curb attacks on Christians, who make up just over two per cent of India's population. He also assured the WCC leader that steps would be taken to restore the confidence of the Christian community, pointing to their protection under the Indian constitution.

Around 6000 troops have been deployed to keep the peace in Orissa's Kandhamal district, where around 20 per cent of the half million population are

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Christian Christianity's roots in India go back to the first century, when the apostle Thomas is believed to have arrived in Kerala in the year 52.

Christian Today

Vatican goes green

As Pope Benedict XVI again called on young people to defend nature from a "correct ecological perspective", the first solar panels have been installed on the Paul VI auditorium at the Vatican.

BBC News reports Pope Benedict has become the first pontiff to harness solar power to provide energy for the Vatican.

Roof tiles on the Paul VI auditorium, used in poor weather for the Pope's weekly audience with pilgrims, are being replaced by 2700 solar panels.

The photovoltaic cells will convert sunlight into electricity, generating enough power to light, heat or cool the 6000 seat hall, engineers say.

Andre Koekenhoff, one of the workers putting up the cells, said the initiative was an attempt to make the Vatican "a little bit greener".

"With this plant, if it is working, in about two weeks we avoid 200 tonnes of carbon dioxide, and this is the equivalent to 70 tonnes of oil," he said.

When the hall is not in use, the surplus energy produced will reportedly be fed into the Vatican's power network.

The Paul VI auditorium was designed by architect Pier Luigi Nervi and built in 1969, but the cement panels on its roof were deteriorating and it was decided last year to replace them with solar panels.

The panels, reportedly worth more than \$A2 million, were donated as a gift to the German born Pope by a Bonn-based

company, Solar World, Associated Press reported.

Meanwhile, Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* reports the first saplings of the **Vatican Climate Forest**, a reforestation project to offset the Vatican's carbon dioxide emissions, will be planted this month. An American company and its Hungarian partner are restoring more than 600 acres of forests in Hungary along the Tisza River to offset emissions of carbon dioxide.

The companies said last year they would donate to the Vatican enough mitigation credits to offset the Vatican's annual CO₂ production, estimated at 10,000 tons. The gift is worth almost \$A375,000, the newspaper said.

Faiths unite on finance

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams has said greed is the root cause of the current economic crisis, and has called on Christians and Muslims to work together to decide upon a fairer system of borrowing and lending.

"The Christian tradition has always been cautious about interest and for many centuries it was very much of one mind with the Islamic tradition, but after the 16th century that changed," Williams, the leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion, said last month after a three-day meeting in Cambridge of Christian and Muslim scholars and clerics.

Williams said, "I would like very much

to see a dialogue developing with Islam about this question of what a just, a reasonable rate of interest might look like in the light of a religious ethic, but this work is very much in its infancy."

A joint statement issued by conference participants urged world leaders to act together to ensure that the burden of the financial crisis and the global environmental crisis did not fall unevenly on the weak and poor.

"We must seize the opportunity for implementing a more equitable global economic system that also respects our role as stewards of the earth's resources," the statement said.

Referring to the situation in Mosul, northern Iraq, where almost 1400 Christian families have fled their homes in fear for their lives, participants said, "These threats undermine the centuries-old tradition of local Muslims protecting and nourishing the Christian community and must stop."

The statement described the meeting as, "the most significant gathering of international Muslim leaders" to have taken place in Britain, and they said it had been matched by a similarly wide diversity of traditions and geographical backgrounds among the Christian participants.

The meeting marked the first anniversary of an open letter, **A Common Word Between Us and You**, by 138 Muslim scholars and clerics to Christian leaders urging followers of the two faiths to find common ground to promote world peace.

Ecumenical News



Lecturer in Missions

The Reformed Theological College, Geelong, Australia, is seeking to appoint a full-time lecturer in Missions and one other key teaching area (Theology, Ethics, Church History or Practical Theology). The expected starting date is January 2010.

The position is suited to someone who has a research degree in one of these fields and who has extensive experience in missions, evangelism, church planting or a significant discipleship/mentoring ministry. Proven ability in teaching, communication and interpersonal skills and a strong commitment to reformed theology are essential.

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Making our mark

Two invidious bills in Victoria show the need for Christians to re-examine their approach.

Late in the evening of 10 October, exhausted members of the Victorian Legislative Council voted 23 to 17 in favour of Australia's most liberal abortion law legislation, the Abortion Law Reform Bill 2008, thereby setting a new benchmark for other states. This followed Legislative Assembly approval by 47 votes to 35, bringing to an end a long and impassioned debate in both houses.

The second reading of the bill alone occupied 50 hours of debate with the great majority of members expressing their position on the legislation. Many amendments, centring mainly around reducing the time before which an abortion is deemed late term, the conditions to be met for approving a late term abortion and the definition of conscientious objection were all defeated by similar margins in both houses.

I discussed details of the law and set abortion in the wider context of Australian society in August's *AP*, so will not revisit that. What many people do not understand is that a second, more invidious bill, the Assisted Reproductive Treatment Bill 2008, containing provisions that will socially re-engineer what constitutes a family, has been stealthily making its way through Parliament.

In this article, I review how such radical legislation can get into and be approved by Parliament, gauge the value and impact of contributions of Christian groups and individuals to the debate and eventual outcome and conclude with some lessons for ongoing Christian political involvement.

Biblically as well as historically in all cultures, it has always been understood that children need relationships with both a mother and a father, and the example of male and female identity in the love between their parents, and between each parent and the children. Sometimes it happens that this ideal becomes fragmented by death, illness or choice, or the individuals are less than ideal in fulfilling their responsibilities to each other and their children, but the ideal remains.

This will no longer be the case in Victoria should the Assisted Reproductive Treatment Bill 2008 be approved.



**David
Palmer**

Under the proposed legislation persons seeking to undergo infertility treatment must not be discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation or marital status. In other words, single persons and homosexual persons gain access to assisted reproductive treatments. Two men, two women, or a single man or a single woman might become a parent through the use of the technology and surrogacy or gamete donation. The bill has passed its second reading in the Legislative Assembly, 48 to 36, but one hopes it will encounter greater difficulty in the Council.

**The
abortion law
represented
unfinished
business for
radical
feminists.**

The reason for the abortion legislation was not immediately clear. There has been no discernable public agitation, unlike euthanasia. In practice, restrictions on abortions simply do not exist.

The key to understanding is that the somewhat ambiguous law existing in relation to abortion represented unfinished business for radical feminists.

So, how did radical feminists get to achieve Australia's most liberal abortion law? The answer lies in Emily's List, a pressure group formed in 1996 to get more progressive Labor women elected to Parliament on a pro-abortion, pro-equity, pro-childcare, pro-equal pay and pro-diversity platform. The Victorian Assembly (88 members) has 12 women members sponsored by Emily's List, while the Council (40 members) has five.

For much of the debate on the Abortion Bill, the former Victorian Premier, Ms Joan Kirner, a founder of Emily's List, was in Parliament providing leadership and encouragement. With the votes taken, Ms Kirner was reported expressing delight at

the passage of the Bill. "That's been 45 years of hard work ... and it's very moving to see it finally happening."

On the other hand, the Assisted Reproductive Treatment (ART) legislation is largely a concession to the homosexual lobby. At this point it is instructive to consider how the Victorian Government went about bringing about changes in the law for these two potentially divisive issues. The following elements were clearly discernible in the Government's strategy.

First was the employment of a stalking horse, namely the Victorian Law Reform Commission (VLRC), a Government body, formed in 2001 by the newly elected Labor Government, with a pedigree in "progressive" social reform. In both the Abortion and Assisted Reproductive Treatment (ART) enquiries, the Attorney General provided narrow terms of reference which set the scope for each enquiry and defined the desired outcomes.

In the case of the enquiry into ART, the deck was further stacked by the appointment of a four-member advisory committee, comprising two activists in homosexual law reform, an activist Family Court judge and the head of the Infertility Treatment Authority.

Submissions were sought for each enquiry. Christian organisations, including the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, as well as individual Christians made submissions along with other groups and individuals. While personal contact with the commission may be cordial, the distressing feature of these enquiries is that the Christian and other conservative voices count for so little. In the abortion review, the commission specifically recommended *against* measures proposed by Christian groups in support of women undergoing the trauma of a possible abortion. Having received the commission's reports, the Government was able, with very little massaging, to convert the recommendations into the bills presented to Parliament.

The second element of the Government's strategy was to time the introduction of the two bills into Parliament sandwiched between the

Olympics and Grand Final week and to run them virtually concurrently through the Parliament on an extraordinarily tight time schedule to reduce opportunity for scrutiny. Although all MPs were allowed a conscience vote there is anecdotal evidence that Emily's List and Labor's Socialist Left faction exercised tight discipline over their members in achieving passage of both Bills.

The wonder is, given the machinations of the Government and the oft-quoted 80 per cent of Australians supporting a women's right to an abortion, why the Government had so much difficulty getting its legislation approved. There is in fact anecdotal evidence from pro-life politicians that the bill might have been defeated but for the offensive antics of some of the parachurch pro-life groups.

Why the difficulty? A number of reasons can be offered. The first is simply that abortion represents a bad outcome that no one can disguise: a child's life ended; there is a growing body of literature that many women suffer consequences; the gynaecologist who safely delivers a 24-week-old child is the toast of the dinner party whilst the abortionist remains silent.

There are some things no matter who we are or what ideological position we take, that *we can't not know*: abortion is bad.

A second reason is the recovering conservative voice, essentially a Christian voice in the public domain, and this voice proved loud, persistent, coordinated and well argued, despite media attempts to ignore it. A particular feature has been the coming together of Catholics, Evangelicals, Pentecostals and the Orthodox, with the Australian Christian Lobby having a recognised valued presence in the Parliament.

A third reason is the growing number of socially conservative persons entering Parliament. These are mostly in the Liberal Party, but the smaller conservative, essentially Catholic vote in Labor should not be discounted.

In the end, the sheer weight of numbers from Labor's dominant socially "progressive" wing, buttressed by tight discipline, proved overwhelming.

What lessons can be drawn from this experience for pro-life, pro-family, and pro-freedom of religion positions?

The Victorian Abortion/ART legislation sets a benchmark that others, principally Emily's List, but the homosexual lobby as well, will seek to emulate in other states. Emily's List is not just a Victorian phenomenon, but boasts 122 Labor Parliamentarians Australia wide.

Whether they succeed will be determined on a state by state basis. Factors which will work against their success include Labor out of power, unpopular or else holding only small majorities

How then should the Christian constituency in general and Presbyterians in particular respond to what Gertrude Himmelfarb describes as "the de-moralisation of society"?

The worst thing would be to ignore the various issues on the grounds that preaching, pastoral care and evangelism are more important. This would fail the Biblical test (e.g. Jeremiah 29:7) and ignore church history.

First, we must frankly admit that, with some notable exceptions, the churches and Christians generally have been asleep, and have only been aroused by the near-imminent passage of unwelcome, morally deficient legislation.

Second, we need at the very least to match our opponents in conviction, in clarity regarding our goals, in education, organisation and fund raising.

Here are four suggestions for raising our game in somewhat embryonic form.

The first is to acknowledge that the reliance of the church and parachurch groups on the "prophetic voice" alone, as important as it is, is insufficient. The church has four voices available to it: the prophetic, the academic and professional, the persuasive and the artistic. Winning public arguments will require use of all four voices. The academic and professional voice means time, hard work and dedication, the persuasive voice needs skill and patience, the artistic voice requires creativity and insight.

We need to listen carefully to our opponents and, when they advance a position that we know or at least think to be wrong, we must confront them. At present our opponents are trashing the Christian position, often with poor arguments and invariably with misrepresentation. They do it in Parliament as with the abortion debate, they do it in the media, and in the universities and we ought not to let them get away with it. If we don't contend then the 66% of Australians who

identify themselves on the census form as Christians will begin to think we have no answers and, worse, we don't care.

The second suggestion is to cascade down to state level a proactive strategy similar to that employed by the Australian Christian Lobby at the last Federal election, involving early input into political party policy, making as well as gaining public undertakings from the politicians on specific issues.

Third, we must pay more attention to seeking influence with politicians. During the recent abortion debate in Victoria, politicians claim to have received thousands of emails from pro-life persons, with not a few offensive. Far better to write letters that make the point in a civil manner, even better a request from a minister with several knowledgeable lay persons for a 15-minute appointment in a politician's office.

It is important to remember that politicians are law makers and therefore the principal line of approach must be to critique the proposed legislation. Weak points must be identified and attacked. A politician who becomes convinced that a bill is not right in law cannot vote for the bill. In this way bad legislation is undermined and defeated.

Fourth, Christians generally – but not the churches – should band together on a state by state basis, as Emily's List does, setting aside sectarian differences in order to select, train, educate, mentor and fund candidates for pre-selection by the main parties – Coalition and Labour — for federal and state parliaments. We need our well informed Wilberforces of conviction in Parliament. We need suitable gifted young people to consider a life of service in politics. More specifically, the churches and parachurch groups need to teach their people, and young people in particular, a confessionally based, thoroughly all-of-life embracing Christian worldview.

Behind all these suggestions lies a profound conviction that the Christian voice — currently too uncertain, too muted, too lazy, too sporadic — needs to be raised and clearly heard in the public square. We should never underestimate our power to influence debate in the public domain. But precisely because we do underestimate our power to influence, we either end up understating our case through timidity, or else we (prophetically!) overstate our position in the expectation of defeat and glorious martyrdom. We can do better, a lot better!

David Palmer is convener of Victoria's Church and Nation Committee.

Word perfect

We live in the constant tension between words and images. But words rank first.

While standing at the supermarket checkout queue, vacantly staring into retail space, a Sydney housewife suddenly heard a soft hissing sound coming from the magazine rack next to the picnic bars and chewing gum. A shiny snake was coiled around the wire rack swaying gently next to a picture of Nicole Kidman.

With a hypnotic thrum, he said in a voice like cream made audible, “Behold, this New Idea magazine is pleasing to the eye. ‘News’ to be desired to make one wise.” And she did pick up the golden mag and did peruse thereof. Then she did give it to her husband. And he saw some hot looking babes and he also did read of it. And when they had finished, they hid themselves in The Coffee Club, because they were ashamed.

The omnipresent image. It does not take a *60 Minutes* TV reporter to discover that our culture has an insatiable appetite for visual stimulation. Popular magazines show glossy pictures of good frocks and girls behaving badly. Television, DVDs, movies, the internet, 3G mobile phones, blackberries, Playstation, Game Boy, WII and X-Box hail down on us like an image blitzkrieg.

Current studies confirm that the television screen is flickering about 40 hours a week in the average household. We are addicted to images. When text and image appear side by side on a page, it is the image which screams for our attention. It is images, not books, which define our ideas of goodness, beauty and truth.

We are victims of, or perhaps happy heirs to, our biology when it comes to explaining this irrepressible tendency towards invoking images. Pictures stimulate the right brain and connect our emotions with the image. If asked how many people were killed in the 9/11 attacks, we might have trouble remembering an exact figure. If asked if we remember the picture of the second plane crashing into the twin towers and the flames, we instantly recall these images, where we were on that day and how we felt.

Our whole economy rests on the pre-eminent power of the image. Capitalism is driven by consumerism. Consumerism is created and sustained by advertising.



Helen
Owen

Advertising banks on loyalty to a brand established through “building an image” with which the market can identify. We’re all just credit card-crazed teletubbies living in one vast, happy TV land.

Should we be disturbed by these seemingly benign technologies devoted to providing the populace with instant ET (entertainment therapy)? After all, TV doesn’t give you cancer. X-boxes don’t cause car accidents. The answer, for Christians, is a qualified yes. There is a

legitimate, divinely ordained function of the image. God uses visual imagery to communicate truth. The worship in the Tabernacle and the Temple involved stylised statues, carvings, golden candlesticks and colourful, elaborate stitching on the clothes and curtains.

But, while these were examples of artistic beauty, they were never objects of worship in themselves. They pointed the Israelite back to God and redemption through sacrifice. As “shadows of heavenly things” (Heb. 8:5) “copies of the true” (Heb. 9:23), the objects in the sanctuary beckoned the viewer to see *through* them towards the future person and work of Christ in the New Testament.

That said, if our culture is to stand any chance of truth and safeguard itself from silly or dangerous lies, then the primary means of communication must be words, not images. Why? Because God is invisible. He is an abstract proposition. No other medium possesses the objectivity and permanency needed to convey this truth. As Neil Postman observes in his

book, *Amusing Ourselves To Death*, writing itself is a “symbol system of a symbol, twice removed from reality and perfect for describing a God who is also far removed”. The God of Israel is not anti-semitic. He loves words. If you believe that the very words of the Holy Scriptures are inspired and therefore infallible, then they must stay as that – words.

Some things can not be translated onto the screen. God responded to King Belshazzar’s rebellion by writing Hebrew letters on the wall, *mene mene tekel upharsin* – not a power point presentation of *What Not To Wear* to a quietly dignified evening of wine, figs, and the odd bit of human sacrifice.

God’s decree absolute in Eden was “don’t eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”. Satan used the attractive image of Adam and Eve becoming celestial celebrities, via that red delicious, to kill them in cold blood. When they abandoned God’s Word and embraced the lie of the image, death followed.

Another compelling reason for the pre-eminence of words over images lies in the second commandment – found in the Decalogue (ten words). This command didn’t mean that you couldn’t make representational art, it meant you couldn’t worship it. Postman says that the inclusion of this qualified prohibition of images means that “its author assumed a connection between forms of human communication and the quality of a culture”. No sooner had Moses gone up the mountain to fetch the granite law, than the Israelites replaced the Word of God with the glittering image of the golden calf. Consequently, they suffered a plague and died in the wilderness.

Thus, a pattern emerges in the Bible and many events in human history. In Rome, image worship prevailed. The Roman emperor Nero built a 35-metre-high statue of himself as a narcissistic object of worship. Similar statues, mosaics and portraits of pagan gods and leaders arose in the streets and public places demanding sacrifices and service.

Refusing to acknowledge Caesar as pre-eminent above this plurality of deities, Christians worshipped one God exclu-

sively. Result – the Colosseum and amphitheatres, where the people bayed for bloody spectacle, saw thousands of Christians crucified, set afire and torn apart by wild beasts.

Fast-track to the 15th century. The revolutionary use of the printing press was instrumental in breaking the Roman Catholic Church's stranglehold on Bible texts. Arthur Hunt, in his book, *The Vanishing Word*, says: "The story of the Protestant Reformation is a story of how printers and booksellers were enlisted to bypass the priests and place the gospel message directly into the hands of the public."

Martin Luther, Tyndale, Calvin and all the major Reformers were in the unprecedented position of having both their sermons and the Bible translated into the vernacular and thus spreading with wings of fire across Europe. Under the sovereignty of the printed word, literacy and education flourished. Schools, universities, democracy, exploration, science, medicine and increased prosperity emerged. The Word equals life. And life, in this print-oriented culture, bloomed richly.

However, during Hitler's reign in World War II (1939-1945), the lights went out again in Germany. The dark Nazi propaganda machinery actually burnt books. Instead, they used the emotionally-charged visual medium of films, rallies, colossal architectural monuments, swastika flags and ultimately the crazed images of Hitler himself to kill tens of millions of people.

In 2008 we don't burn books, let alone the people who read them. The devil did a masterful sleight-of-hand by sidelining the word to the bin of irrelevance. In his digital dominion, image is sacred. You can't argue with an image, it just is. The "people of the book" have become creatures of the visual. We frequently talk about what we've seen on TV. But we rarely, if ever, question the effect these images have on our culture. They have become our culture.

Men, if you want great-looking women to like you, value words over image. Instead of tired lines about "starry eyes" and "heaven's missing angels", ask her what books she's read lately. I guarantee she will be so shocked and pleased that a Y chromosome actually admired her books above her looks, she will swoon into your arms like a love-sick schoolgirl.

Seriously, there is no neat, three-step

solution to the spell of the visible. Don't throw out your television, those little image-gremlins will just pop up on your phone, computer and billboards. So do we embrace images or hold them at bay? Do we have a choice? The hard truth is we have to live in the constant tension between words and images. Images will not go away, nor should they. How then should our present culture navigate its way through this "Hall of Mirrors" and into truth? The only way is to trust the objective Word of God as our guide, not our eyes alone. "For we walk by faith, not



It is these very words that form the grid through which we are to judge the flat-screen fantasies that flicker at us night and day.

by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). But "faith is ... the evidence of things unseen" (Heb. 11:1).

Difficult as it is, (I too am the proud parent of an electronically addicted "screenager"), we should obviously encourage children to read the Bible and lots of other good books. Additionally, we should teach them to "read the image" and thereby tame the beast of the age.

Hunt suggests schools teach a subject called "media ecology". If children learn what goes on *behind* the camera, and know how and why a particular medium sways people, then the power over them is lessened. Also, we must facilitate children having real engagements with life – not just pseudo events lived vicariously through a screen.

Finally, the image is as powerful a force as any of the primitive drives like food and sex. God hard-wired all of them into our brains and bodies. But as the images we encounter touch the heart, let them also stir the brain and point us back to the One who worded us into being in the first place.

That One is Jesus, Logos, the Word – as revealed in the 66 books of the Bible. He is the originator of objective reality. He created stars and sun and earth and space. When He performed the miracles, He transformed *real* substance and matter like blood and hands and seas

and wine. He created the optic nerve, the brain, light and shadow. You can't train a camera on Him. But, He is *real*. He is *truth*. All else are chimeras and illusions.

It is no accident that there is no historical pictorial representation of Jesus Christ. Had he left a picture behind, we would only exalt it above the Word. In fact, Isaiah 53 says that there was nothing in his appearance that would draw us. It is the words He spoke with authority that changed the world, one soul at a time. It is these very words that form the grid through which we are to judge the flat-screen fantasies that flicker at us night and day. So let us saturate ourselves in the Word of God. Read, read, read it. Then watch and rejoice as those modern spectres that bewitch our eyes – evaporate, like a chilling mist, before the golden warmth of Jesus Christ, the living Word of God.

Helen Owen is married with two sons and attends the Christ Presbyterian Church on the Gold Coast.

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prayer

NOVEMBER 2008

- 21 Laszlo and Eva Mihalyi *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Donvale, Melbourne with Pioneers involved in church development and outreach in Budapest, Hungary.
- 22 Presbytery of Moreton (formerly North Brisbane) 5 charges and 1 home mission station totaling 7 congregations with about 540 c&a (communicants and adherents) and 175 yf (younger folk – Sunday School and youth), 4 retired ministers and 1 under jurisdiction. Paul Cornford clerk.
- 23 Paul and Carol Lukins *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Condobolin NSW in Ethiopia with SIM International involved in church planting among the nomadic Mursi people.
- 24 Bendigo charge with about 65 c&a, 10 yf and 2 e (elders); Philip and Sandra Burns.
- 25 Sue Poynter *mission partners* (APWM) worker from Canterbury, Vic. in Japan with Overseas Missionary Fellowship involved in outreach through music and teaching English.
- 26 Tocumwal-Finley-Berrigan charge (3 congregations) southern NSW with about 190 c&a, 90 yf and 9 e; Bruce and Jackie Hammonds.
- 27 Paul & J. D. *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Bundoora, Vic. in SE Asia with Missionary Aviation Fellowship.
- 28 Wisdom and integrity for new members and ministers in WA, NT, NSW and ACT parliaments – and the national Senate.
- 29 Harland and Marie Kerr *mission partners* (APWM)/Wycliffe Bible Translators workers from NSW veteran translators for the Wiru people of PNG – and their health needs.

- 30 Carmel charge, The Gap western Brisbane with about 55 c&a, 20 yf and 7 e; Chris and Michele Perona, Clare Niven.

DECEMBER 2008

- 1 Presbytery of Riverina (formerly Murrumbidgee) 3 charges and 1 home mission stations totaling 7 congregations with about 500 c&a and 160 yf, 1 retired minister. Bruce Hammonds clerk.
 - 2 Woonona charge south of Sydney with about 160 c&a, 90 yf and 3 e; Peter and Janet Currie.
 - 3 Atherton Tablelands home mission station N Qld including Atherton and Mareeba with about 80 c&a, 30 yf and 5 e; Cameron and Renee Wills.
 - 4 Eltham charge Melbourne with about 90 c&a, 40 yf and 4 e; Don and Anne Elliott, Max Walker.
 - 5 Glen and Rachael Connor *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Sydney Central (Darlington) charge with the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu lecturing at Talua Ministry Training Centre, Santo.in
 - 6 West Wyalong charge southern NSW including also Barmedman and Talimba with about 105 c&a, 15 yf and 10 e; Graham French.
 - 7 Matthew and Kiri Vander Heiden *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Blacktown East, Sydney on home assignment from Portugal with Pioneers/European Christian Mission, involved in theological teaching.
 - 8 Christian witness and influence in the workplace through believers at all levels, and industrial chaplains – especially with rising unemployment.
 - 9 Sunshine charge western Melbourne with about 55 c&a, 15 yf and 8 e; John Kae-Yeon and Young Bok Cho.
 - 10 Presbytery of Geelong 5 charges and 1
- home mission stations totaling 10 congregations with about 500 c&a and 95 yf, 1 research professor, 1 retired minister and 1 under jurisdiction. Graham Hammill clerk.
- 11 Alex and Sybil Shaw *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Epping, Sydney with Global Recordings Network (since 1969) involved in recording and distributing Christian messages and training recordists.
 - 12 Bexley-Rockdale charge (2 congregations), Sydney with about 125 c&a, 70 yf and 7 e; Ewen and Elizabeth Brown.
 - 13 Carol Whipp *mission partners* (APWM) worker from Somerville, Vic. in Wolverhampton, England with WEC International working with an Indian church.
 - 14 The Gateway Family church, Anna Bay near Newcastle NSW with about 100 c&a, 50 yf and 5 e; Robin and Julia Turner.
 - 15 Heathmont charge Melbourne with about 30 c&a, 10 yf and 1 e; Andrew and Marilyn Venn.
 - 16 Uphold in prayer the non-ministerial elders of your own and neighbouring charges.
 - 17 Scots charge Geelong West, Vic. with about 65 c&a, 25 yf and 8 e; Dave and Tanya Assender.
 - 18 Safety, refreshment and profitable use of time for families as they go on holiday.
 - 19 Plenty of participants for Proshikkon (“training”) the APWM/WBT training experience in Bangladesh throughout January led by Keith Benn.
 - 20 Randwick charge eastern Sydney with about 160 c&a, 40 yf and 15 e; Grant and Susan Thorp; and the Indonesian charge including Kingsford with about 450 c&a, 250 yf and 7 e; Joni and Oen Liwe Lan Tjong, Joe and Mavis Mock, Johnie and Ellen Li.

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Books

Faith: It's Always Been a Matter of Trust

Bryson Smith
Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2008.
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

Bryson Smith is one of the pastors at Dubbo Presbyterian Church. He writes as he preaches – in a conversational style that is easy to follow. He is especially adept in the use of illustrations and in summarising the biblical message in a clear and cogent way.

Bryson suggests a novel interpretation of James 5:15, namely that it refers to the spiritually weary, not the physically sick. It would be interesting to see how he fits that in with the command to anoint with oil. Bryson's capacity to illustrate biblical truth is enough to arouse the envy of other preachers. He tells of his dirty carpet, his library's deletion of all his borrowing records, including, thankfully, the occasion when he borrowed a book by Paris Hilton, for his daughter, the need to clean the Weet Bix off the high chair before it dries, how he once found it very difficult not to be swept along by the beat of a brass band, and how his young son thought an ATM was an inexhaustible source of money. You will have to read the book to get the contexts.

This is a work that is designed to help people grow in the faith, but it will also help Christians to communicate that faith.

Peter Barnes is books editor of AP

What is a Healthy Church Member?

Thabiti M. Anyabwile
Crossway Books, 2008.
Reviewed by Kim Dale

There is continued discussion within Presbyterian circles about what constitutes a healthy church. For a number of years, Queensland had a committee of the assembly committed to this one issue.

Sometimes what is obvious is easily

overlooked: to have a healthy church you need to have healthy church members. This short, easily read book packs a lot in as it paints a picture of a healthy church member. There are important issues that need further treatment but this book keeps it brief and lays out, with practical application, 10 marks of a healthy church member. I found it a real encouragement that resonated with much of my desire for the local church I pastor.

Notwithstanding some minor cultural differences, it is an excellent read for those engaged in the day to day equipping of God's church for the work of ministry. There are numerous sermon ideas for encouraging Christian growth within the context of the local church. Pastors who have heard much about expositional preaching will be glad to read the section on "expositional listening"! This book is well worth the short amount of time needed to get its basic message.

It is a publication of the Nine Marks ministry headed by Mark Dever, senior pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington DC. www.9marks.org.

Kim Dale is minister of Tamborine Mountain Presbyterian Church, Qld.

Memories of Sandfields

Bethan Lloyd-Jones
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2008.
Reviewed by Mignon Goswell

The reader of this short book finds the heart of a godly ministry wife. The love Bethan has for her church family is clear on every page. This book has snippets of the life of the first pastorate of Martyn and Bethan Lloyd-Jones in a small Welsh village. There are accounts of remarkable conversions, insights into the weekly program of the church meetings, an account of a summer spent in Canada and a delightful chapter on the Sunday School enjoying the Whit Monday holiday.

I was taken by her admission that she went to "Aberavon without a qualm or misgiving. I had never really thought about my position there. It was ignorance." I don't imagine she is alone in that feeling!

How lovely to read of a wife who was entranced with her husband's ministry in the right sort of way: who saw his remarkable gifts used to bring so many to Christ and so many to a more mature and

enlightened faith.

The amount of weekly church meetings seems astounding to a modern reader but in a world before television, modern communications and extensive entertainments, and where some were unable to read, these meetings provided great spiritual but also social benefits for the church members.

The epilogue too where Bethan describes the pain of leaving that first charge will surely resonate with many – to tear herself away from these people she was devoted to was grief indeed.

Many people know of the ministry of Martyn Lloyd-Jones. We may be apt to forget that Bethan was a highly capable, medically trained, articulate woman who contributed much to her husband's ministry. She writes in a way that will make you shed tears of thankfulness to our Father who can shine his light on the young and the old alike.

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

All books reviewed are available from the Reformers Bookshop – Phone: (02) 9569 9857 or visit www.reformers.com.au

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The coming crisis

Soon the faith the Queen of England is supposed to defend may be Islam.

Having been raised in the cultural centre of the universe – Liverpool, England – and having taught among the Gauls for 18 years in the South of France, I keep my eye on Europe.

In the UK, a new Government education policy requires the teaching of “multiculturalism” in every subject. Multiculturalism takes many forms. Christians in the UK, as in Canada, are fighting a battle we may one day face in the USA. Parliament has proposed “Sexual Orientation Regulations” to prevent discrimination against gays. Christian ministers would be sued for refusing to bless same-sex civil partnerships, and Christian adoption agencies would be fined for refusing to place babies with homosexual couples: £500 to £1000 for a first offence, up to £25,000 for subsequent offences.

In the UK two views of culture clash. A petition from the Lawyers’ Christian Fellowship calls on the Queen, the putative “Defender of the Faith”, to uphold her coronation oath and denounce the “Rules”. But the “Rules” come from the Government that keeps her in “Buck House” and legislates this triumphant program of multicultural relativism. Why? To the statement in a recent poll, “Religion is very important to me in my daily life,” only 24% of the British responded positively – the next-to-lowest rate in the world. It turns out there is hardly any faith for the Queen to defend. Easy job, great pay!

The lowest response came from the French at 23%. Most “religious” Frenchmen call themselves “Catholic”, but only 52% of Catholics believe there is a God! Of those who do, around 80% believe that God is a “force” or “energy”. And France has another pressing problem: no French babies. The “Nation” is not reproducing itself. Is there a relationship between physical reproduction and religious commitment?

Into this spiritual and demographic multicultural void gallops militant Islam – armed with both faith and babies. The highest response (96%) came from Egyptians. This figure is typical for



**Peter
Jones**

Muslims, who also have the highest birth rates in Europe. Mohammed is the most popular name for new-born boys in Brussels, Amsterdam, and Rotterdam. By 2025, one third of all European children will be Muslim. Then we shall talk of Eurabia, because young Muslims are

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increasingly radicalised. While only 17% of British Muslims over 55 said they would prefer to live under sharia law in the land of the Magna Carta, 40% of their children under 24 want sharia to rule.

For French writer, Jean Raspail, the present social crisis is a clash between two definitions of France: “the Nation” (with its long history, biological identity and “Christian” religion) and “the Republic” (a political notion based on the secular “values” of democratic utopianism). A comparable clash occurs in Germany between the children of Luther and Bach (who produced the secular pluralistic state of modern Germany, but are no longer making little Luthers or Bachs) and the recent Turkish immigrants (many of whom do not speak and do not wish to speak German, but who produce numerous little Turks).

A similar crisis is brewing in the USA, where two notions of America are in tension. One is “America the free” (freedom of speech and religion, which has become the natural domain of pluralistic secularism). The other is “America under God” (the belief that the American experiment depends on a constant appeal to “the Creator” and to the ethics of the Bible). The spiritual

domain has always been tacitly granted to Christianity, exercising, as if by divine right, though without a Queen, a sort of spiritual custodianship of the culture.

All that has changed! The tension has become a clash. Christianity has been weakened by the power of secularism and by rising religious paganism that demands equal spiritual custodianship of the nation and free political expression of its views. (We still await the arrival in force of Islam, though a congressman was recently sworn into office, hand on the Koran.)

Secularism, paganism and Islam all have their sights on a this-worldly social victory. Christians have a more complicated stance, with one foot in the kingdom of this world, and one in the kingdom of Christ. This dual-citizenship frees them in this world to stand for truth and justice, have babies, build churches as signs of the coming kingdom of the transformed universe, and live for Christ, whatever the cost, like the black pastors and churchgoers in London who have made it known that they will go to jail rather than accept the “new rules”.

One day Christians may be jailed in the brave new world of once “Christian” Albion – with no help from the Queen. But eventually, they will live free forever in the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic Kingdom of Christ, with those from every nation and tongue who honor Jesus as Lord of lords and King of kings.

Peter Jones is founder and director of Christian Witness to a Pagan Planet. ap

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