

# AP

Australia's reformed  
evangelical periodical

SUMMER 2012

## Peace in an age of anxiety

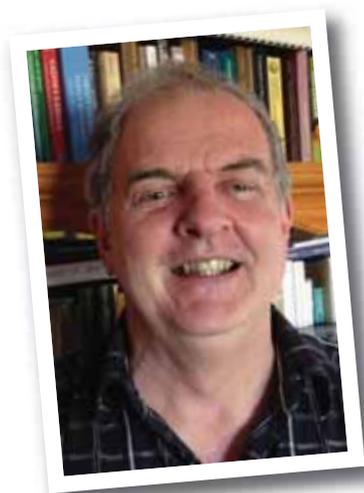
Ed Welch on  
overcoming fear

Even in death God  
promises grace

The Arab spring  
sends a chill



# Editorial



**G**od's Word tells us that "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits" (Prov. 18:21). Presumably what we write is of equal importance. Words can be like medicine or like bullets. Those who use words often – like journalists, teachers, politicians, and pastors – have a particular responsibility to be both truthful and judicious. In 1625 Ben Johnson's play, *The Staple of News*, appeared, which has one of its characters say: "Though it be ne'er so false, it runs news still." This could well become the motto for any number of

our television programs, especially those which purport to inform as well as entertain.

The Christian has a vocation before God to love words and to use them well. God speaks to us in words. For example, He spoke words to Moses, these were written in the Book of the Covenant, and then read to the people (Ex. 24:1-8). These are not camp fire stories, or myths and legends, but God's inerrant truth. In using words, we are imitating God; we seek to do what He does.

After Augustine became a Christian in 386, and gave up his job as professor of rhetoric at Milan, where he wrote panegyrics (i.e. lying press releases) for the emperor, he dismissed all his carefully constructed speeches as "so much smoke and wind". However, he did not lose his love of words. Rather, he referred to them as "precious cups of meaning".

Jesus Himself says something very frightening: "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Mt. 12:36-37). Words are so precious before God that we are made culpable before Him for how we use them.

With this issue, *AP* moves into another stage of its existence. It will remain a worthwhile journal only as long as it seeks to be faithful to God, truthful with reality, and useful to His people in teaching, challenging, comforting, correcting, inspiring, and building them up in God's Word. Many pundits are saying that the Age of Google has replaced the Age of Gutenberg, so pray that *AP* will fulfil its godly commission to the printed page.

**Peter Barnes**

**sanders  
NOONAN®**  
REAL ESTATE AGENTS

A BUSINESS BASED ON  
INTEGRITY + SERVICE + RESULTS

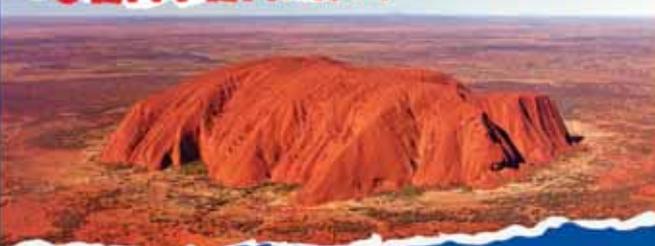
CALL 02 9570 9999  
OR 0421 357 357

Ask for Mike Noonan and mention this ad.  
Email: [mnoonan@sandersnoonan.com](mailto:mnoonan@sandersnoonan.com)

"as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone,  
and especially to those who are of the household of  
faith."

[www.sandersnoonan.com](http://www.sandersnoonan.com)

**JOHN FLYNN  
CENTENARY**  **TOURS 2012**



ULURU, THE OLIGAS, DARWIN, BROOME, PERTH, LAKE EYRE...



GREAT OCEAN ROAD AND MORE...

 **Christian Fellowship Tours**  
"Travel the world with like-minded people"

Book now! **1800 796 656**  
[www.christianfellowshiptours.com](http://www.christianfellowshiptours.com)

# Be not afraid

Fear affects everyone, but God has answers.

Ed Welch talks to Peter Hastie

**D**r Ed Welch is Adjunct Professor of Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary WTS, and faculty at the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation CCEF, both in Philadelphia, USA. He has worked as a research associate in electrophysiology and holds graduate degrees in theology and psychology including a PhD in psychology. He has been with Westminster and the CCEF since 1981.

Dr Welch has written several books, including *The Counselor's Guide to the Brain and its Disorders; Addictive Behavior; Blame it on the Brain; When People are Big and God is Small; Depression: A Stubborn Darkness;* and *Running Scared: Fear, Worry and the God of Rest.*

He is also a frequent contributor to the *Journal of Biblical Counseling* where he has written on such diverse subjects as suffering, depression, attention deficit disorder, multiple personality disorder and the use of Scripture in counseling. His short essays appear weekly at ccef.org. He has recently served as an adjunct faculty member of the PTC Victoria.

**Ed, everyone experiences fear but what is it that makes us fearful?**

The experience of being afraid usually arises out of our concerns about the future. We anticipate that something difficult, or even catastrophic, is going to happen to something or someone we love. And why do we think so? Well, bad things do happen, and sometimes those things can be *really* bad. And since there is a possibility that those bad things could happen to us, we become afraid and anxious.

**We use a variety of terms to describe our sense of unease about difficult situations in the present or future. Are these terms meant to reveal the intensity of our disquiet about what is**

**happening or could happen to us?**

I think that's certainly part of it, but when it comes to the "fear" family of words, almost everything is intense. Sometimes there might be a distinction between whether or not the dreaded event is present or future. The word "fear" can be used when we are in it; anxiety usually suggests that the event is somewhere off in the future. But in our everyday language most of the like-minded words, such as panic, identify powerful experiences.

**Fears are a good opportunity to say, 'Lord, search me. Are there things I'm trusting in more than You?'**

One element to fear or anxiety that we often miss is that it is interpersonal. It's one thing for bad things to happen. It is another to be *alone* when there are bad things. Fear is a very relational phenomenon. Our fears are intensified when we're alone. Fear is a lot easier to face when we have others with us. I think we have all had experiences where we have been in strange and dark surroundings that have left us on edge. It's amazing in a situation like this how the presence of another person – or even a pet – can temporarily assuage our most stubborn fears. This takes us right to the very heart of Scripture and the promise of God's presence.

So I think fear feeds on two things in particular: first, the knowledge that bad things can happen to us and, second, that we might have to face this situation alone. For many of us the most terrible aspect of fear is that we feel so alone in facing it. There is a woman at our church who was overwhelmed with fears, and when she

was asked, "What are you afraid of?" she said, "I am afraid I will die alone." She's a single woman with few friends, so we said to her, "If we live longer than you, we will make sure you do not die alone." That was the last time she mentioned her fear.

When people don't know Christ that sense of isolation often accentuates their fears. The writer to the Hebrews talks about the fear of death that resides in every heart. He also mentions faint echoes of judgment that haunt us too. So I think we can say that we all struggle with fears, believers and unbelievers alike, but some of our fears are intensified by an underlying sense of isolation and fear of death.

**Is there anything unnatural or sinful about being scared?**

The first issue in dealing with fear is not, "Is it sinful?" Rather it is: "To whom will I turn when I am afraid?" I'm thinking here of Psalm 56 where the Psalmist says, "*When I'm afraid...*" I think the psalmist is saying, "I am a human being and I constantly experience bad things that make me afraid. Nevertheless, when fears come upon me I will turn to the Lord." I think that's where the emphasis lies in Scripture: not on the feelings of fear, but on where we turn when we have fears.

The other thing I would add is that fears are just a good opportunity to say, "Lord, search me. Are there things I'm trusting in, or are there things that I love more than You?" Fear tends to identify our loves – we're afraid we're going to lose something that's very precious to us. So whenever we are afraid we can search our hearts. Do I love somebody or something else more than God? In this sense, fear is not sinful but it is a perfect occasion to consider critical spiritual matters.

**Does Scripture give us any hope that**

we might escape the experience of fear?

No, it doesn't. We won't find any promises in the Bible that we're going to be spared the things that we fear. Some of the things we fear most might be the very things that come upon us.

However, in Scripture we discover that God is a God of compassion. For instance, in Luke 12:32-4 it reads, "Don't be afraid, little flock: for your Father has been pleased to give you the

kingdom." This comforting passage reminds us that God loves us and is with us. Nothing can separate us from His care. So we won't have a fear-free life, but we can expect to grow in knowing God's comfort in those fearful situations.

I have just talked to a friend today who is struggling with panic attacks. He has used this as a time to grow in knowing Christ, and he has certainly grown. The fruit of that growth, however, is not

freedom from panic attacks. It is that he turns quickly to Jesus when they arise and he is resting in his Good Shepherd in a way that inspires me.

**Ed, are some people more prone to worry than others. Are they wired that way?**

That's an interesting question. I think of my own family where I'm the one who is prone to worry and my wife is not. It's not that she lacks an imagination to envision scary future possibilities because she certainly can do that. I think I tend to be more self-analytical and a bit more pessimistic in nature whereas she's a can-do optimist. So I think that those of us who tend more towards pessimism can be a bit more prone to worry.

**Why do we often imagine that things are worse than they really are?**

There a couple of reasons for that. I think the obvious one is that we tend to imagine the worst in order to prepare for the worst – if we can invent all the possible contingencies then we won't be taken by surprise if they happen. So I think some worry tends to be a form of self-protection. It's a way of preparing ourselves for the worst.

Here's another reason. Let me use the illustration of drowning because it's been significant for me. I'm actually a pretty good swimmer, and I like being around water but I've been in near-drowning situations, and the idea of drowning scares me. I can remember an overwhelming sense of fear that came on me after I saw a horrible drowning episode in a movie, and I knew then that I had to take a harder look at my fears.

What was at the root of them? I think the answer is that I was trying to imagine the future without factoring in the grace that God would give me in such a situation. It's not hard to identify the grace that God gives me for today because it's a real and present experience. But it's harder to imagine grace for tomorrow.

A passage I've found helpful in this regard is Exodus 16. It's about God's daily gift of the manna to Israel. I think this passage speaks directly to my fears because it reminds me that God will

**A TRADITION OF CHRISTIAN CARE & CONCERN**

**Christian Funerals of Sydney**

FAMILY OWNED AND OPERATED  
FUNERALS CONDUCTED THROUGHOUT SYDNEY

Please call Richard Spiteri  
for personal care and attention

Members of the Funeral Directors Association of NSW

24 Hour Care Line ☎ 8883 4561  
[www.christianfuneralsosydney.com.au](http://www.christianfuneralsosydney.com.au)

*Richard and Deborah Spiteri, proprietors*

**PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL CENTRE**

**COMMENCEMENT & GRADUATION SERVICE**

**WEDNESDAY**  
7<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2012  
7:30PM

To be held at  
**Audrey Keown Auditorium**  
Presbyterian Ladies' College  
Boundary Street, CROYDON

The Occasional Address  
will be given by Rt. Rev. David Jones  
Moderator General of the  
Presbyterian Church of Australia

Parking available on grounds via Young St  
Please join us for supper after the service.

For enquires please contact:  
Phone: (02) 9744 1977  
Email: [adminptc@ptcsydney.org](mailto:adminptc@ptcsydney.org)  
Website: [www.ptcsydney.org](http://www.ptcsydney.org)

give grace to me only for today. The grace I need for tomorrow will come tomorrow. And spiritually, it's a good thing that we don't receive tomorrow's manna today because then we could go for two days without turning to Christ for grace. The amazing thing about the Christian life is that God has so structured it that we need fresh supplies of grace every day – new manna – “grace” being the New Testament word, “manna” the Old Testament one. We need new manna for each day.

**What is it about worry that enables it to get such a grip on us?**

It's interesting that we speak of fear getting a grip on us. I was thinking of some Scriptural expressions like “fear came upon them” and “fear gripped them” – it's like this outside force. And with Christmas in mind, we remember that fear overwhelmed the shepherds. I think that's the nature of strong fears – they're powerful and paralyse us. But why do they have such a grip?

I think it's because we fear losing something we really love. It might be our own lives or precious friends. One of the things that I find as I get older is that there are more people that I love. I have more grandchildren, I have sons-in-law, I have people in my church that I love more dearly than I did 10 years ago. And so we can become afraid to lose them.

When Jesus said, “Don't worry,” is he implying that any concern we have for others or for ourselves is wrong? If one

**of our little children was lost, is it wrong for us to be worried for them?**

Again, I think this is where the Psalm 56 and Luke 12 passages speak so powerfully to us. Psalm 56 doesn't rebuke fear. It tells us where to turn. Luke 12 seems to rebuke it, but the context shows us something quite tender.

“Don't be afraid” is in the imperative, we read it as a command. It means, “Stop fearing”. When we read it like this it has the power to multiply our anxieties because whatever fears we had before are now compounded by our guilt because we can't quell our fears.

But there's another way to read it as well. It's possible to read it as an expression of paternal care. It's the kind of comment that a father might make to his son before he goes out driving: “Son, be careful.” While it's technically an imperative, what I am really saying is, “Son, I really love you. I know there are dangers when you go out driving, so please be careful.” So when you hear, “Don't be afraid” from that perspective, it has quite a different tone to it.

Now there are times when I believe “Do not be afraid” is a command. When people cowered from taking the land and refused to do battle, their fear was sinful. Otherwise, the speaker is not so much the Commander but the sympathetic and gentle Shepherd.

**Is it wrong to use the law of probability to quell our fears?**

That's an important question. There is

a right way to use probabilities and statistics as well as a wrong way.

For example, if one out of every three aeroplanes crashed and killed everyone on board, then it would not be a wise thing as a Christian to fly. Statistics can point out the path of wisdom.

**That's the nature of strong fears – they're powerful and paralyse us. But why do they have such a grip?**

However, I think it's wrong to use statistics to quell our fears. I know a man who struggled with fear. His wife called him one day from work and said that she was really scared about the possibility of being assaulted. His response to her was that there had never been one instance of rape or robbery within five miles of where they lived. He thought he was being helpful to her, but he was actually encouraging his wife to trust in statistics rather than to trust in Christ's protection and grace. It's a sin when we trust in probabilities. We don't trust in the odds; we trust in Christ.

**When people are afraid, they often experience a range of physical symptoms like a racing heart, shortness of breath, sense of panic. Is it possible to overcome those symptoms?**

I mentioned my friend who struggles with panic attacks. The curious thing

**LOOKING AHEAD >>> SCHOLARSHIPS 2013**

**Fairholme College**

Girls entering Year 6,7,8 or 10 in 2013 are now invited to apply for an Academic, General or Music scholarship at Fairholme College, Australia's leading independent day and boarding school for girls from Kindy to Year 12.

**APPLY ON-LINE NOW @ [www.fairholme.qld.edu.au](http://www.fairholme.qld.edu.au)**

**THREE MUSIC SCHOLARSHIPS NOW ON OFFER see audition and application closing date details at [www.fairholme.qld.edu.au](http://www.fairholme.qld.edu.au)**

Scholarship examinations will be conducted in Toowoomba and other rural and regional areas from 28 February - 6 March 2012. For further details regarding times and venues please contact our enrolments officer Mrs Emily Veal.

**T 07 4688 4688**  
**E [enrol@fairholme.qld.edu.au](mailto:enrol@fairholme.qld.edu.au)**

*Proudly a College of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland*

**APPLICATIONS CLOSE FRIDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2012**

about his panic attacks, and this often happens, is that they occur when things seem, on the surface at least, to be going normally. Panic attacks can happen when you're enjoying a movie, or during a pleasant dinner, or when you're driving and listening to some uplifting music on the radio. They don't always descend on us when we're in the midst of our anxieties and worries.

Anyway, he had a panic attack in a restaurant while he was with Christian friends enjoying a meal. He found it difficult to breathe and was physically ill. That's why we started speaking together about it.

## To reinforce the command, He also gives us promises like 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'.

So the question is, is there anything you can do to deal with those physical symptoms? In theory, there are some things you can do. The world specialises in ways to calm us physically. "Breathe into a paper bag", or they will get you to use a bit of logic – "OK, I've been here before. I didn't die in the past and I'm not likely to die now." But I think for most people, the key is to persevere in the midst of something that doesn't endure for a very long period of time – it can go for a few minutes, and not normally much more than that.

Just a little more about my friend. I asked him, "What was going through your mind when you were being sick outside?" He said, "One thing: Jesus help me!" I gave him a big hug and said, "You are my hero." I believed that if this man immediately and instinctively said, "Jesus help me!" then that is a mark of true sanctification.

### Does the presence of stress provide any clues about the unconscious fears that may be driving us?

Yes, it does. Emotions are the language of the heart. They tell us what we both love and fear. When we are stressed there is usually fear involved in some

way. So it's a good time to ask ourselves: "What is my heart really saying? Am I more concerned about my own reputation than God's? Do I believe that He will give me grace for today? Is there something that I love more than God and I am fearful of losing it?" These are the sort of questions that stressed people ought to ask. Of course, we may not be able to avoid the stress but we can always go to the default position of calling out, "Jesus, help me!"

### God commands us not to fear more than any other command. Is that significant?

I just love how the Lord is happy to repeat Himself. In this case, His reiteration tells us that fear is so common. It also shows that God is patient and compassionate and that we forget that He cares for us. To reinforce the command, He also gives us promises like "I will never leave you nor forsake you". Also, as Presbyterians we should notice that God's covenants – especially His renewal of the covenant – has our fears in view. Noah's covenant is a case in point. It addresses the issue, "What's going to happen next time there's a cloud in the sky?" The answer God gives Noah is: "Don't be afraid, although you have reason to be. Here's My sign – a rainbow. Every time you see it, you know that I will not destroy you in a flood." Again, the Lord's Supper is a sign that God will not cast us away forever because of our sin.

### Is there any underlying attitude that we need to have that might protect us against fears?

I've been meditating on Psalm 131 and I think it has an important message. It reminds us that all our biblical strategies for dealing with fear must be combined with humility. Psalm 131 says that we mustn't concern ourselves with matters that are too great for us – we must be humble in the face of God. Ultimately, in every situation we need to be able to say, "Lord, you are God and I am not. I cannot understand Your ways but I will honour You by being a child who trusts in You." Even the most comforting promises of Scripture, until they are animated by child-like

humility, do not bring the depth of comfort that God affords. We need to be able to say, "Lord, you are God, and you can do what you please. Your plan is good and whether I can see it or not is beside the point." I think that humility is the greatest gift for fearful people.

### How should we deal with the fear of death?

A couple of years ago a friend of mine, a pastor, was diagnosed with a terminal melanoma. I remember the day he went to the doctor's to get his pathology report, which he knew would not be good. So I went to his house and waited for him to return.

Suddenly he walked in the door and I started crying. He said to me, "Ed, nothing has changed." In one sense that wasn't strictly true. Everything had changed. He had two young children and a wife who would be left alone when he was gone. So everything did change with that prognosis.

However, what he meant was that he still believed that God was good, that God was with him, that God's promises are true and all God's purposes would be perfectly fulfilled. In that sense, nothing had changed. I've often thought that when it comes to death, that's what I want to be able to say. If for some reason my own death is something I anticipate before it happens, rather than happening unexpectedly, my hope is that I will be as convinced as my friend that God was good when I was well as He is good during my suffering. To use the words of Job, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." I'm praying that that's what I will have manna to do when that time comes.

*As editor of Australian Presbyterian for the last 14 years, Peter Hastie designed the interview format that has characterised this magazine. Although he can no longer continue as editor due to his appointment as principal of the Presbyterian Theological College of Victoria, he has kindly consented to contribute interviews to future issues of AP.*

# Even in death...

God promises grace – precisely when it is needed. **Morag Zwartz**

**I**doubt that anyone, in suggesting this article to me, had any idea of just how well qualified I am for such an endeavour. Let me explain: the obvious reason is the recent death of Samuel, my 17-year-old, against a backdrop of fragile – now precariously ill – parents, and a second son with significant, at times life-threatening, health problems. Hospitals have been my life, for many years.

But it is not for any of this, really, that I feel qualified (if the reader will forgive this somewhat pompous description) to write. You see, no one outside God and me really knows how much I approach this topic as an extension of my every waking thought – my obsession – fear and worry. This is far from a jesting boast, though there may be amusement in the absurdity of it. I certainly have to laugh in dismay at times. But if there is someone reading this who is more prone to worry, anxiety and fear than I am, I would dearly love to meet him or her. I might garner some tips on retaining spiritual equilibrium while churning in a sea of terrors.

**While we grit our teeth and grasp on to Him, God, meanwhile is holding us, and His is the grip that matters!**

Before I deter you completely, let me hasten to say that I have managed to acquire techniques and helps for this journey through dark places, and can say with genuine conviction that my hope is in God who does not fail me, and that I have proved Him over and over again. I cannot yet say that I have reached my greatest desire, which is to love God without wavering, without fear, and unmoved by calamity or death. I know, I know, perfect love will

displace those fears, and God will keep me in absolute peace, when I keep my thoughts fixed on Him. When.

Samuel (pictured three days before he died) was in a death dance with cancer for most of his life, with periods of a form of normality between the onslaughts of medical interventions and chemotherapy. Although he was born with the disadvantage of Trisomy 21 (Down syndrome) his cancer became a greater obstacle and identifying feature than his other problems. But you could say that there was always plenty of opportunity to practise trusting in God and in His unknowable plans for us.

Along with this, for much of my Christian walk there has been a gradual but engrossing discovery taking place, best summarised as an appreciation of and growing delight in the sovereignty of God. Part of my journey from Pentecostal (and confused wilderness) to Reformed has been the embracing of a God who is too great and mighty and downright glorious to be contained and explained. Who does not conform to our very human (and erroneous) notions of how things should be for nice, earnest, Bible-believing folks. Who does not owe us an explanation for why our child is born deformed or disabled or ill unto death. Who dares to bring about the one thing non-believers most deplore – the death of a child.

It is an ineffable blessing and joy, though, to be able to state, and feel, that God does as He chooses, and this is absolutely fine with me, since His knowledge and His providence are way beyond my comprehension. How could I question Him?

But I appreciate one does not come lightly to this view, and I have the sermons and writings and commentaries of our Reformed heritage to thank, in as much as they have elucidated the glorious truths of Scripture.

That is not to say there are not times when it requires great effort to overcome a sense that my burden is too great, that I am sinking, or that I cannot face another day. Some readers will also identify with the particular anguish of loved ones not yet in the Kingdom – yet another challenge to our trust and our peace of mind.

Because Samuel's cancer kept returning and because each time he relapsed we faced the probability of his death, I had many opportunities to nut these things out with God, to ponder and to grasp His promises, and to cling to Him just to keep functioning at the most frightening moments. After one relapse



I experienced a period of overwhelming terror – I was convinced that when Samuel died I would lose my sanity. I was brought close to a place that hitherto I had only imagined and I glimpsed what I now know, emphatically, to be true. There is nothing in this world anything like – even remotely like – death.

There were many times when, with a second son in ICU, or with both seriously ill in hospital simultaneously (this happened three times over the years) I found myself more consciously, desperately, dependent upon God than I manage at other times, even though I believe we each need to live with a moment by moment sense of total dependency upon Him. I discovered that while we grit our teeth and grasp on to Him, God, meanwhile is holding us, and His is the grip that matters! His the one that makes ours feeble and fleeting by comparison.

Many years ago I went to hear the WEC missionary doctor Helen Roseveare speaking, and she told us something memorable about her experience of being brutally assaulted by soldiers in what was then the Belgian Congo. God did not give her the strength to endure their cruelty before the moment when she needed Him to. His grace was indeed sufficient – precisely when it was needed.

I have learnt something similar – indeed it's my most precious discovery, and one that is constantly being forgotten and rediscovered: much as I would love to feel God's presence as a physical certainty, and see God with my eyes and not just my spiritual sight, and know perfectly His reality, all of these are right there in the words of Scripture. And they are evident in my own history.

I see the tightrope of God's words that

I have wobbled along and I see that He did not, after all, let me plummet. In ways that never cease to astound me, those words bounce out of the pages of my Bible with their unimagined solace. And what catches my breath is rarely related particularly to my conscious need or longing – it is something of God, vital and nourishing, in the meagre crumbs of a plain meal. It is usually not in the familiar places of Scripture that one might turn to for comfort.

## On the surface is merely unexceptional words, but beneath, quickened by God, is the treasure trove of His character.

It could be just a phrase, such as “Jesus was in the stern sleeping”, or “the God of all comfort”, or the crowd's reaction to Jesus: “They were amazed at His teaching.” Or even the sublime intimacy of God's words to Moses: “Tell them to return to their tents, but you stay here with me.” It might be the exuberance of Elijah as he goads the prophets of Baal, or the inspiring confidence of Micaiah as he stands alone among the prophets – his face stinging from being struck – to deliver words of fearsome truth before Kings Ahab and Jehoshaphat.

It might be those wonderfully contrite words of Nebuchadnezzar, “Now I praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just”. Or the movingly devoted concern of new convert Naaman, as he apologises because he will appear to bow to an idol when the king leans on him. Sometimes a mere look can conjure up the superlative nature of God – the

look Elisha gave Gehazi when he exposed his lie about taking gifts, or Jesus' face before he healed the man with a withered hand: “He looked around at them in anger and deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts.”

On the surface is merely unexceptional words, but beneath, quickened by God, is the treasure trove of His character.

On days when I felt I could not survive, I devoured hungrily such Scriptures, and sometimes also the familiar sustaining passages in the Psalms or John's Gospel. On occasions I even wrote a verse on my hand in order to focus on it until the day ended and I could praise God for His mercy through yet another day. Because I memorise Scripture less easily than I once did, I'm excited to have developed the new habit of memorising hymns – no doubt helped along by those daily school assemblies that always concluded with a hymn!

I began with those based on a psalm (Ps 23, 90, 100, 103) and then found many others just bursting with sweet doctrine (Immortal Invisible, O Love of God how Strong and True, O worship the King, to name just a few). Like those energising passages of Scripture, each hymn brings in its wake a radical change of perspective and reminds me how small is my largest problem beside an infinite-sized God.

Indeed, when I look upward I am silenced by that God-perspective, though when I look forward I am full of fear. When I look backward I am comforted by the evidence of His presence – silently steadfast, unchanging, never-failing.

*Morag Zwartz is author of The New Age Gospel: Christ or Counterfeit?, Fractured Families, and Apostles of Fear. She is a member of Donvale Presbyterian Church.*

All profits support the work of missions  
Providing Christ like care for grieving families  
Personalised care & support  
Prepaid Funeral Planning

**Bethel Funerals**  
Compassion • Peace • Hope

Victoria 03 9873 8866  
Marrington Peninsula 03 5975 1955  
Queensland 07 3343 8444

24Hr 7 Day Service  
Servicing the Melbourne Metro, Marrington Peninsula & Country Areas, SE Queensland, Gold Coast & Sunshine Coast

www.bethelfunerals.com.au



# Spring storms

Many outcomes are possible across the 'Arab Spring'. **Noel Weeks**

Anybody who thinks history is irrelevant should follow closely the events consuming many Arab countries at the moment and the attitudes of Western governments and commentators to those events. It can be argued that the West is seeing the events in terms of its own dominant theory of history and ignoring the alternate possibilities.

The Western hailing of the turmoil as a "Spring" flows from reading the movements as democratic with all that connotes in the Western mind: free, progressive, secular. In turn that flows from a theory that sees democracy as the inevitable direction of history. The Arab world is following us in demanding freedom and rights.

A little knowledge of history, especially of history as experienced by Arab peoples, might allow other possibilities. And that is not to deny the reality of Western influences in what is happening.

As a start this is not the first movement in living memory which owes something to Western influence. When European imperial powers such as Britain, France and Italy withdrew progressively after World War II from the sections of the Arab world they had dominated, Arab thinkers saw the possibility of the resurgence of Arabic culture and power to the position of influence it had known in the Middle Ages. Coming together in that movement were memories of the former greatness of Arab civilisation, the importation of nationalistic ideas from the West and a sense of resentment at the outside powers who had held them in subjection during the age of European empires.

Since the great age of Arab power had been under Islam, that was the model, yet the movement was not sectarian. One of the founders was Michel Aflaq,



PHOTO: REUTERS

who was a member of an Arabic-speaking church whose lineage goes all the way back to the church of the Eastern Roman Empire. The aim was to unite Christian and Muslim, Sunni and Shi'ite, in a movement whose characteristics were that it was Arab, non-sectarian and democratic. Hence arose Pan-Arabism, the United Arab Republic and the Ba'ath Party.

What happened to that great dream? Saddam Hussein and the Assad family in Syria were, or are, the remnants of it, claiming Ba'ath affiliation. Yet both represent a form of military dictatorship built around a religious minority. If there is a remnant of the Ba'ath lineage it is in their attitude of toleration to the Christian church. Egypt and Libya were also military dictatorships. The fall of Saddam unleashed a wave of persecution of Christians in Iraq that forced a very large proportion to flee the country. There is a very real prospect that the same could happen in Syria, if Assad falls. There are ominous signs of a similar threat in the new Egypt.

There are unavoidable questions arising from this history. Some actions of the Pan-Arabists may not have pleased some in the West, such as Nasser's

nationalisation of the Suez Canal, but on the whole its objective was Western-style governments. Why in country after country were they replaced by military dictatorships? Is relatively stable democracy not the future to which all must come, but rather the product of special circumstances?

Looking at countries such as Japan and India, it would be foolish to argue that Christianity is the sole preparation for democracy, but one can argue that it is one such preparation. Of course Western governments and commentators determined on secularisation and immorality cannot allow that democracy might need an ethos, for which Christianity is a preparation.

Yet a lapse back into military dictatorship is not the only possibility. The great Arabic culture of the Middle Ages produced a brilliant analysis of the dynamics of the Islamic cultures of western North Africa: *The Muqaddimah* (Introduction to History) by Ibn Khaldun. He observed that dynasties tended to become corrupt and senile, estranged from the population and oppressive. As that happened so their grip on power slackened until there arose a group united by a purer religious faith. That

group would overthrow the old and corrupt dynasty and establish their own, which in turn would eventually succumb to the same cycle.

A prominent British Jewish figure, Lord Jonathan Sacks, has suggested that Ibn Khaldun is a significant influence upon al-Qaeda. A movement motivated by Islam defeated the Russians in Afghanistan and, partly as a consequence of that defeat, Soviet Communism collapsed. Now they are fighting against corrupt Western governments and also against the corrupt regimes which support the West, such as in Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

I have no special insight into the motivations of al-Qaeda, but the significant thing is that the dynamics of that movement conform to the pattern recognized by Ibn Khaldun: a revolutionary movement inspired by a “purer” form of Islam that seeks to overthrow regimes it sees as corrupt and those who support them.

Let us not deny the fact that their view of many Arab governments and particularly of the West as corrupt is plausible. One of the immediate consequences of the Allied attack on Saddam Hussein’s Iraq was the flood of

pornography unleashed upon the country. Such corruption is symptomatic of the West in the eyes of strict Muslims, and they are not wrong.

Therefore one of the possible consequences of what is happening in the “Arab Spring” is the establishment of Islamicist movements in power. There is evidence that that is what is happening in Libya where one of the first acts of the new regime was to legalise polygamy, which Gaddafi had opposed. It is ironic that this is the country where the West played the greatest role in defeating the old regime.

I spoke previously of Christianity as providing the conditions for successful democracy. One of those preconditions is that the successful party must govern for the good of, and in the interests of, the whole nation; not just of the group which supported it. That flows from God’s command to us to do good to all men. That Christian ethos is not commonly accepted. Where sectarian and tribal mentalities prevail the more common thing is to punish the opponents.

A radical Islamic party winning means persecution. In turn that means the party presently in power must use all

means to stay in power, knowing that to lose power is a death sentence. Hence the brutality with which the Alawis in Syria and the Sunnis in the Gulf states have clung to power. That is not to approve what has happened there. It is simply asking whether the West has a practical contingency plan, if a change of government in any of those places unleashes a bloodbath.

There is another alternative. Many people in these countries do not want Islam, particularly the more legalistic forms of Islam. That may be partly because they have been influenced by Western secularism, but it also flows from experience. Islam is now deeply unpopular in Iran. Hence a great interest in Christianity that at the moment is being held down by political and social pressure. Mass turnings to Christ are a real possibility. Please note that that anticipation is coming from native Christians involved in these countries.

So what will be the outcome of the “Arab Spring”? Military dictatorships, maybe immediately, maybe as a result of attempts at democracy descending into chaos? Or radical Islamic regimes opposed to the church, to the West and to forms of Islam that are not their form; hence persecution and mass migrations such as has happened with Christians from Iraq as a result of the bungled Western attack? Or revival of the church and turning to Christ whether directly or in reaction to legalistic Islam? Maybe an Islam-wide war of Sunni against Shi’ite with stupid Western governments taking sides? We simply do not know what will happen and all these outcomes are quite possible in different places. Personally, I would put Western-style democracies as lowest on the list of possibilities.

*Professor Noel Weeks is a Sydney University historian.*



**Scholarships**

**SCOTCH COLLEGE MELBOURNE**  
FOUNDED 1881

*For entry to Year 7, Year 9 or Year 10 in 2013*

- Academic Scholarships
- Music Scholarships
- Boarding Scholarships
- Means-tested Scholarships

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

Examination date: Saturday, 25 February, 2012  
Applications close: Tuesday, 14 February, 2012

Application details:  
[www.scotch.vic.edu.au](http://www.scotch.vic.edu.au)

Further enquiries: Admissions Office  
Tel: 03 9810 4203 / Fax: 03 9810 4333  
Email: [Admissions@scotch.vic.edu.au](mailto:Admissions@scotch.vic.edu.au)

Scotch College Melbourne 1 Morrison Street, Hawthorn Vic 3122

## FREE

To give away to a good home – 60 copies of “Christian Worship” hymnal, and music book. Contact Rev Rod Waterhouse on 0438555983, [rodhouse@gmail.com](mailto:rodhouse@gmail.com)

# news

## Catholic work ethic

Despite the vaunted Protestant work ethic, Catholic men aged 25 to 54 earn 6.7 per cent more income than their Protestant counterparts in Australia, an analysis of the Household, Income Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey has found.

Southern Cross University senior economics lecturer Michael Kortt, who conducted the study in conjunction with University of New England professor Brian Dollery, said no statistically significant spike was observed between Protestants and any other group, including those with no religious affiliation.

Dr Kortt said one possible reason was that being raised Catholic “might instil in a person a series of characteristics such as discipline, which may be rewarded by the labour market”.

*Sydney Morning Herald*

## Islamist threat in Tunisia

An unofficial “committee for the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice” has been launched in Tunisia as the country moves in an increasingly Islamist direction. The newly-formed organisation, which is supported by Salafist groups, does not have government recognition, but no action has been taken to stop its activities.

The committee has taken it upon themselves to see that Islamic virtues are upheld in public life: they are aggressive towards women who do not abide by their code of dress, and they make their presence felt at mosques and Koranic schools, where they are trying to impose imams with Salafist views.

The formation of the committee has sparked fears among many liberal and secular Tunisians about the risk it poses to civil liberties. Highlighting the example of Saudi Arabia, where official religious police strictly enforce sharia law, one Tunisian commentator said,

“Is this the fate of Tunisia? Is this post-revolutionary Tunisia?”

*Barnabas Fund*

## Brave Christian sacked

A Christian worker at London’s Heathrow Airport has been dismissed after she stood up for a colleague who was bullied and harassed by Islamic fundamentalists at Britain’s leading airport and border control.

According to a press release on behalf of the Christian Legal Centre, despite working at Terminal 3 for 13 years, and having many friends among staff of all religions, Nohad Halawi was summarily fired following unsubstantiated complaints by five Muslims about her conduct. Mrs Halawi had persistently complained to management over personal religious abuse and harassment from Islamic staff, who even used foul language about Jesus”.

Christian Concern says if Mrs Halawi’s allegations about the influence of Islamic fundamentalism at Heathrow is true, this case raises huge issues of national security, religious discrimination and the rights and welfare of thousands of workers. The Christian Legal Centre has instructed top human rights barrister Paul Diamond to represent her.

## Church repairs delayed

In 2005, a Muslim mob enraged by allegations of blasphemy against a Christian pastor and urged on by religious leaders torched three churches, a school, a convent and numerous Christian homes in Sangla Hill, near Lahore, Pakistan

Many of those buildings remain in poor condition, even after nominal efforts by the government to rebuild them, say church and school officials, who have demanded that the government take action.

Sister Andrea Sardar, principal of St

Anthony’s Girls’ High School, said: “The windows are still without glass and students find it difficult to study in cold weather. Our school and hostel were renovated but cheap materials were used. Cracks are now appearing in the newly cemented floor. Even the doors, which were fixed instead of replaced, are giving way.”

## Film sparks crackdown

Chinese authorities have confiscated copies of a new documentary about overseas Chinese Christians and detained a chief representative of the company that produced and distributed them. Jiang Yaxi of the Flowers in the Desert Television and Film Co., was seized from her home by special agents of the Domestic Security Department.

She had reportedly been under investigation since August over her company’s production and distribution of *Beyond* by a Christian filmmaker, the Rev. Yuan Zhiming, who was once on the Chinese government’s most-wanted list for his part in the Tiananmen Square democracy movement in 1989. He fled to the US, and became a Christian two years later. *Beyond* is a nine-part DVD series that tells the inspirational stories of Chinese people whose lives were transformed when they went to another country and found Christ.

The police have started formal legal proceedings against Jiang; she has been placed under criminal detention, which is the first step in a process that almost always results in conviction of a crime.

*Barnabas Fund*

## Protest at shoe insult

More than 3000 angry Pakistani Christians have held a protest rally in Lahore condemning sale of shoes incorporating Christian crosses. Some Muslim leaders joined the protestors, who were wearing black armbands and headbands. The protest ended after pastors led hymn singing.



# ne life.

## What's it all about?

*Christianity Explored* gives you time to think about the big questions of **life** and to consider the **life** of the person at the heart of the Christian faith - Jesus Christ.

- 7 week journey through the Gospel of Mark
- Stunning new DVD presented by Rico Tice
- Comprehensive leader's guide means anyone can run the course



*"This is a very fine evangelistic tool. The Leader's Guide is a treasure trove of experienced advice for conducting the course. The beautifully produced DVD takes us through the claims of Jesus as recorded in Mark's Gospel. And Rico Tice is one of the most engaging evangelists in the world today."*

**Michael Raiter**, Principal, Melbourne School of Theology



## Christianity EXPLORED

To find out more call (02) 9564 3555 or visit:

[www.thegoodbook.com.au/ce](http://www.thegoodbook.com.au/ce)

**the goodbook**  
COMPANY

“Our Christian identity has been insulted”, said Pastor Samuel King, president of the Pakistan Minorities Movement (PMM). The group had previously confiscated 1200 pairs of shoes, inscribed with a cross and Christmas symbols, from a shop. Its owner was arrested on November 26 but freed by police after three days.

Christians have pointed out the hypocrisy of Pakistan’s controversial blasphemy laws, often used to victimise minorities to carry out personal grudges or business rivalries, but which do not protect minorities.

*UCA News*

### **Confession goes green**

The Kerala Catholic Bishops’ Council in India has announced that Catholics should include sins against the environment when they visit the confessional.

Father Stephen Alathara, spokesman for the KCBC, said: “Any exploitation of nature amounts to sins against God.” He added that the directive would be included in a pastoral letter to be circulated among dioceses this month.

*UCA News*

### **Kashmir Christians afraid**

A fact-finding mission to India’s Kashmir Valley has found that Muslim leaders’ increasingly shrill opposition to conversions has instilled fear among the Christian minority. “Christian men, women and children are in a state of panic, fearful of their security, uncertain of the future, uncertain of their jobs,” team member Dr. John Dayal told *Compass Direct News*.

The Rev. Chander Mani Khanna, pastor of All Saints Church in Srinagar, was arrested in November on charges of hurting religious sentiments of Muslims after several youths were baptized; he was released on bail on December 1.

At the same time, said *Compass*, a sharia (Islamic law) court has reportedly summoned the Rev. Jim Borst, a Dutch Catholic missionary, to appear on charges of proselytising and “forced conversions”.

*Assist*

### **Register, voters urged**

An inter-religious body of minority faiths has staged a nationwide drive to get millions of Malaysians to register to vote, ahead of expected general elections early this year.

At a recent press conference, the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism said there are as many as 4.3 million eligible voters in the country who are not on the electoral roll.

“If you don’t register and vote, it’s like saying you don’t care how your country is run,” said the council’s president Daozhang Tan Hoe Chiew in Kuala Lumpur.

*UCA News*

### **Fury over free pill**

The largest women’s health services provider in Britain enraged pro-life groups before Christmas by offering

women free morning-after pills during the Christmas party season.

With a photo of the word “sex” lit up in Christmas tree lights on its website, the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS), which boasts on its website that it is Britain’s largest single abortion provider, offered women a chance to get free morning-after pills and condoms sent to their homes after they answer a few questions to ascertain their “medical suitability” after a 15-minute medical consultation.

A spokesman said the agency saw more women with an unplanned pregnancy in January than any other time of the year.

But, pro-life groups say that not only is the campaign “vulgar,” according to Josephine Quintaville of the ProLife Alliance, but it will lead to other problems.

*Christian Post*



#### **2012 MINISTRY CONFERENCE**

**DATE** Tuesday March 20th - Thursday March 22nd

**MAIN SPEAKER** Rt Rev David Jones, Moderator General, Presbyterian Church of Australia

**TITLE** *Surviving in Ministry* (book early!!)

#### **MASTER OF ARTS IN THEOLOGY 2012 PROGRAM**

Semester One *Understanding and Preaching Isaiah*

Weekly classes with Rev Dr Greg Goswell

Semester Two *History of Biblical Interpretation*

A one week intensive class with Dr Gerald Bray

#### **FOR FURTHER COURSE INFORMATION AND EVENTS**

**WEB** [www.presbyteriancollege.org](http://www.presbyteriancollege.org)

**EMAIL** [info@presbyteriancollege.org](mailto:info@presbyteriancollege.org) **PHONE** 03 9898 9384



# books

## Smooth Stone Taken from Ancient Brooks

Thomas Brooks, ed. by Charles Spurgeon, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2011.

*Peter Barnes*

Thomas Brooks was one of the most invigorating of the Puritan writers while Charles Spurgeon was a most lively editor of the Puritans. Between the two of them, this publication has emerged, selected by Spurgeon from the six-volume set of Brooks' Works. This is not a work that is easily summarised because it consists of sayings and illustrations from Brooks. But here are a couple. Brooks writes that "As our greatest good comes through the sufferings of Christ, so God's greatest glory that He hath from His saints comes through their sufferings."

The second one is longer: "God is like a prince that sends not his army against rebels before He has sent His pardon, and proclaimed it by a herald of arms. He first hangs out the white flag of mercy; if this wins men in, they are happy for ever; but if they stand out, then God will put forth His red flag of justice and judgment." Congregations often have to endure rather pointless illustrations, but Brooks' ones are invariably picturesque, simple, and memorable.

This is probably not a book to be read through at a few sittings, but one to be dipped into again and again, and thereby to be refreshed.

*Peter Barnes is AP editor*



## Strained Relations

### The Challenge of Homosexuality,

Bill Muehlenberg  
Freedom Publishing Company, 2011

*Darren Middleton*

On December 3, 2011, the ALP changed its policy platform in favour of homosexual marriage. Early this year the Australian Parliament will vote on redefining marriage to include homosexuals. If and when successful, the implications will be far reaching (if poorly understood) for children, Christians, and churches.

With homosexual marriage comes cultural acceptance and normalisation, indeed, federal legislation is being drafted to classify "homosexuality" and "gender identity" as "protected attributes" under proposed anti-discrimination laws. Once homosexual marriage becomes a right there will be corresponding duties insisted on that may yet end up with the criminalisation of opposition.

With that in mind, Bill Muehlenberg's new book, *Strained Relations*, is recommended reading on the issue of homosexuality. The 266-page book contains more than 700 endnotes, in that sense it is scholarly and well documented while being readable and persuasive.

The book is divided into two parts; the first systematically deals with the issue of homosexuality from a medical, behavioural, social, and political perspective, making a comprehensive and cogent argument against the normalisation of homosexuality. He points to the higher rates of partners, drug, and domestic abuse in homosexual relationships while discussing the politics of orientation versus behaviour as well as the vexed topic of rights and discrimination. Part two of the book adeptly deals with the biblical data on homosexuality.

Despite the personal stories of two people

who have left the homosexual lifestyle, my only criticism (apart from my dislike of endnotes) is that the book is not particularly pastoral. A section on how Christians can and ought to love their homosexual neighbour, family or struggling church member would have been most helpful in what is otherwise a comprehensive and faithful book on the important and vexed issue of homosexuality.

*Darren Middleton is minister of North Geelong Presbyterian Church, Vic.*

## The Resurrection of Jesus A New Historiographical Approach

Michael R. Licona  
Nottingham: Apollos, 2010

*Greg Goswell*

If Christ was not raised... the Christian faith collapses, which makes this up-to-date and thorough (700-page) treatment of this subject essential reading. Licona sets out to investigate the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus using the canons and methods of the professional historian. He makes the point that historians are not free from bias, and that this is a key factor in explaining the radically different conclusions that various scholars come to regarding the resurrection. The tendency of scholarly portraits of Jesus is to be a self-portrait of the scholar responsible. In other words, too many biographies of Jesus are in fact autobiographies! Their authors are looking in the mirror rather than looking at the facts!

Despite the habit of many historians (from David Hume onwards) to rule any claim to miracle out of court, Licona maintains that historians need not dismiss all claims that a miracle occurred in "a context charged with religious significance". In fact, the "resurrection hypothesis" may make best sense of the available data, and it is proper for a considered historical judgment to be made on the basis of the data. In other words, we do not

need to be agnostic as to whether Jesus rose from the dead or not.

I find his discussion consistently fair, clear-headed and convincing. For example, Licona points out that no ancient writer would invent the story that it was women who first discovered the tomb to be empty and went and told the men! The willingness of the early disciples to suffer martyrdom means that they were willing to die for what they knew was true. It is plain that they were convinced that they had seen the risen Jesus. That is a secure historical datum.

Licona shows that if we hold a view of reality that allows the supernatural, the "resurrection hypothesis" is the only viable theory that takes account of the historical bedrock. Here, then, is a book that moves debates over the resurrection of Jesus significantly forward.

*Greg Goswell lectures at the Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne*

## In Living Color

**Images of Christ and the Means of Grace**, Daniel R. Hyde, Grandville: Reformed Fellowship, 2009.

*Peter Barnes*

These are strange days in the Reformed camp. Many entertained high hopes that Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the*

*Christ* would prove a wonderful aid to evangelism. John Frame, too, has argued that the rejection of pictures of Christ runs the risk of Docetism, the view that Christ did not really come in the flesh. Daniel Hyde has sought to argue for the classic Reformed position that images of the triune God are not allowed. Man's media consists of images, but God's media are the word and the sacraments.

Pope Gregory I of Rome (590-604) famously argued that images are books for the illiterate: "And if any one should wish to make images, by no means prohibit him, but by all means forbid the adoration of images." The problem here is that God forbids in the Second Commandment both the worship and the making of images. Art is God-given; art used to portray the Godhead is fraught with spiritual danger. We can be thankful for Hyde's clear and comprehensive tackling of this issue.

## Is Hell for Real or Does Everyone go to Heaven?

Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (eds), Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.

*Peter Barnes*

Hell has been marginalised even in the

churches. In response, here are seven short essays in a short book to deal with the biblical evidence. Back in the 19th century, William Gladstone commented that hell had been "relegated ... to the far-off corners of the Christian mind ... there to sleep in the deep shadow as a thing needless in our enlightened and progressive age".

Henry Ward Beecher was one of many preachers who attacked the "spiritual barbarism" and "hideous doctrines" of the Bible. The sensitive John Stott declared in 1988: "I find the concept [of eternal punishment] intolerable, and do not understand how people can live with it without cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain."

However, the biblical evidence is surely insurmountable. The Gospels alone are sufficient to teach this – Matthew 5:22, 39-30; 7:13-14; 10:28; 18:8-9; 23:15; 26:31-46; Luke 16:23; Mark 9:43, 45, 47-48; John 3:36; 5:28-29. More than anybody else, and contrary to popular opinion, it is Jesus who teaches most about hell. J. I. Packer says that we are not all "doomed to be saved", for "the universalists' dream – fantasy, rather – is in truth a kite that will not fly". Love without wrath cannot exist. This book does not make for pleasant reading, but it does make for necessary reading for all who take the Christian faith seriously.



# Subscription Form

Please send me AP magazine...

If you are interested in receiving the *AP* and are not currently a subscriber please fill in your details below, and forward the completed form to the AP office.

### Deliver to:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ City/Suburb \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Country \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

### My Donation towards the costs of *AP*

Please find enclosed

Cheque/money order to AP for: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please debit \$ \_\_\_\_\_ from my

Visa  Mastercard

Account number:

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

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Please send completed forms to:

AP, PO Box 4014, Croydon Hills VIC. 3136

Phone: (03) 9005 8256 Fax: (03) 9876 1941

Email: [manager@ap.org.au](mailto:manager@ap.org.au)

**AP is provided as a ministry tool through the generous support of the Presbyterian Church of Australia.**

# Spiritual deception

the **LAST WORD**

Peter Barnes

## O what a tangled web we weave

**D**eception is something we hate but something we cannot avoid, for there is deception everywhere. When sin entered the world, Eve explained: “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (Gen. 3:13). Satan is called ‘the deceiver of the whole world’ (Rev. 12:9) – no more so than when people do not believe that he exists.

We were made for truth - what Simone Weil beautifully called “the radiant manifestation of reality”. Yet somehow we are immersed in deception.

Television deceives us, advertisements lead us to Vanity Fair, educators deceive us, politicians seem to be able to do little else to us, false teachers abound in the church, and, worst of all, we deceive ourselves. In Paul’s testimony, even God’s law can be used to deceive us: “sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me” (Rom. 7:11).

We deceive ourselves mainly because we are proud and it suits us to deceive ourselves. Paul warned the Corinthians: “Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise” (1 Cor. 3:18).

How many human beings have deceived themselves that they could mingle with worldly people without doing harm to themselves? We tell ourselves: “They may indulge in folly, but I know better deep down and can handle this.” But we deceive ourselves, for bad company ruins good morals (1 Cor. 15:33). We deceive ourselves that we can sow indifference and selfishness and reap all kinds of wonders, but, alas, “whatever one sows, that will he also reap” (Gal. 6:7).

Because we come into the world with a corrupt nature, and are more ready to believe falsehood than God’s truth, we are prone to deception. We easily deceive ourselves regarding immorality, impurity, and covetousness, and the judgment of God, but the Word of God tells us: “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 5:6).

We can profess the name of Christ, indulge in an ungodly lifestyle, and delude ourselves that we will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21). Such a sad state of affairs has probably been quite common down through the ages, but at no time more so than today when trusting in Jesus as Saviour is often equated with believing that He will help me cope with life. We can hear something that sounds Christian, believe it, and carry on unchanged, as though the Holy Spirit – the Spirit who makes holy – had never come into it. Hence James tells us to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22).

Deception can come upon us regarding events leading up to the second coming of Christ. Some Thessalonian believers had given up work, thinking that there was no point to it as the Day had come (2 Thess. 2:3). They have not been the last group in the history of Christendom to be deluded in this area. By definition, the workings of temptation deceive us. We tend to minimise it or evade our responsibility for overcoming it. Sin is just a problem in our lives, and sins are rather like mistakes. In any case, no one is perfect. However, James tells us that desire leads to sin, and sin leads to death. We ought

not to be deceived regarding this (James 1:13-16).

We deceive ourselves if we say we have no sin, and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8). Grace is not lawlessness. It is free, but, as Bonhoeffer said, it is not cheap. Christ did not save His people so that they could continue in unrighteousness but in order to practise righteousness (1 John 3:7). To believe otherwise is to be deceived, no matter how evangelical we try to sound.

Now we come to the most damning and beguiling aspect of deception. This may be best illustrated through recounting the conversion of Arthur Pink. Pink was raised in a Christian home, but sometime in his youth he embraced the tenets of Theosophy. By 1908, at the age of 22, he had become a medium, and practised clairvoyance, divination, and magical healing.

As was his custom, he came home from a Theosophy meeting one night, but this particular night his father greeted him with the text: “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12). Pink was struck, indeed convicted, and was so disturbed that he did not leave his room for three days until he could profess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Saviour.

That is the truly terrible thing about deception. We can be deceived when we think we are doing right. And we only know we have been deceived after we have been delivered from deception. Are you deceived? Virtually nobody believes that he is, but God tells us that many are.

*Peter Barnes is editor of AP.*