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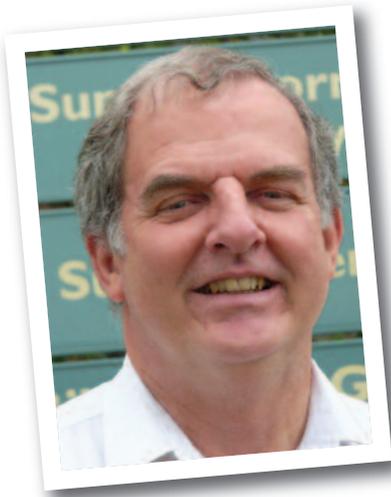
WINTER 2016

Fight the good fight

**Heavens above,
what an idea!**

**Test yourself
against Psalm 23**





Editorial

the confused existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre, as well as a number of lesbian love affairs.

The word “they” has taken on genderless singular proportions. “A person does something because *they* want to” – which is rather bad grammar, apart from anything else. In fact, one group of American lexicologists claimed that “they” now should be used to designate a “genderqueer” person who identifies as neither male or female. Not surprisingly, it was proclaimed to be the word of the year. Gender no longer reflects biological reality, but “choice”. Contrast this to the majestic simplicity of the biblical revelation: “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them”

(Gen.1:27) – which is endorsed by Christ in Matthew 19:4.

If school children are to be taught to be free in their expression of their sexuality, there is no limit to the indecency and depravity which will be unleashed. “God gave them up” (Rom.1:24, 26, 28) is a terrifying expression. Gender is now regarded as fluid, but the only thing that is fluid is the arguments. Homosexual orientation was said for decades to be genetic, but now it is a matter of choice. We can even have two virginities – one for the male experience and one for the female. Make no mistake, once the unreality genie is let out of the bottle, it will be an horrendous task to put them(?) back in it.

Peter Barnes

Once one abandons belief in the God of the Bible, one loses touch with Him and with reality. A relatively early feminist heroine was Simone de Beauvoir (1908-86) who published *The Second Sex* to much academic and popular acclaim. Here she asserted that “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” – yet another case of nonsense dressed up as pretentious high truth. She tried to live up to this principle, and maintained a long romance with

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Fight the good fight



Secularists have not yet won Australia

Peter Hastie talks to David Cook

David Cook, the former principal of SMBC, is Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. He is married to Maxine, and has published short studies on Acts and Romans.

David, your term as Moderator-General will come to an end in September, 2016. What reflections can you share about the state of the Presbyterian Church of Australia?

It has been a privilege for me to move around the nation and get a bigger picture of the health of the church during the last three years. The smaller states, WA and SA, are each facing problems. The Queensland Assembly has generously adopted SA and some encouraging developments are happening there already. NSW has made the offer to assist WA but we are waiting for the relationship to develop. I have only been to Tasmania once. The church there is well-established, faithful and, especially in Hobart, growing.

Victoria has especially impressed me for two reasons. First, at a recent Assembly I met the members of their Church Planting Committee. Their convener, who has planted a church, chairs the committee and the rest are all involved in church planting. They have a clear and effective strategy that has led to the establishment of several new churches. Church planters get churches planted. This is very encouraging.

Second, I lecture at the Presbyterian Theological College Victoria in preaching. They have a very fine body of candidates. In 2017 we will see nine PTC graduates being appointed to

churches and I would be very happy to be pastored by any of those men.

You have written a fortnightly column at presbyterian.org.au and often mention the value of our theological colleges and schools. Why do you believe they are so crucial?

Our theological colleges are training the future leaders of the church and we must protect their commitment to the integrity of the Bible.

The history of the Australian Presbyterian Church reminds us that liberalism infected our denomination in the 1870s and has crippled the church and its mission over the last hundred years. The trouble began in our theological colleges. They were the entry point for the infection and have caused spiritual harm over several generations.

We must never forget that the price of spiritual freedom is eternal vigilance. We need to pray for the colleges, and I applaud any move to make them even more accountable to the denomination. I am sure the college leaders, knowing too well the dangers they face, would welcome a higher degree of accountability.

What of our schools?

The first thing I did when I became Moderator-General in September 2013 was to meet the principals of our schools in Victoria and NSW.

The danger with our church schools is that they become expensive centres of elitism, isolated from the church, inoculating pupils with enough religion

to set them against the true gospel.

Unfortunately, the state education system, which was once quite accommodating to Christian influence, has been thoroughly secularised. Secularists have made education at all levels a primary target and have seized control of universities, teachers' unions and specialist faculty areas such as education, law, sociology, media studies, and journalism, to mention just a few.

I think we need to see our schools as distinctive Christian institutions that encourage open enquiry in search of the truth. Since we believe that truth is best understood through Jesus Christ, the God-man, our schools should seek to persuade students of the rationality of the Christian worldview in all areas of life. Our starting point must be that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7).

This does not happen by accident. The educational process must be initiated and directed by the leadership of the school. For example, in a Presbyterian school in which I am now involved I have seen this happening in very pleasing ways. At Sydney's Scots College, Dr Ian Lambert has just completed his 10th year as principal. The school has just had its best year ever academically. They have also been warmly commended by the NSW Board of Studies and registered for a further five years. They have excellent staff-student ratios, full enrolments and a developing building program. This school takes seriously its commitment to the development of mind, body and soul. The principal has made sure that Christian studies have a high profile

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July 21-23, 2016

Professor Stuart Burgess

BSc (Eng) PHD CEng FIMechE

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and he has increased chaplaincy staff and encouraged the growth of Bible study groups.

The Scots College has become a model of what can be done when the gospel is central. We need to plant more schools like it with a Christian educational philosophy to stem the tide of secularism. I believe that we must develop a clear strategy for planting more schools and these initiatives should come from within the schools themselves.

How do you understand the spiritual state of things in Australia? Is there anything we can do?

I think Australia has become an increasingly secular country while trying to hang on to some Christian social values. While Christianity used to be a major influence in an earlier time in Australia, the position has changed a lot in my lifetime. Atheism has certainly been on the rise since the 1960s and has become quite aggressive in the last decade.

If you look at Australia through the window of the *Sydney Morning Herald* you can see this obvious change. The *Herald's* original founder was John Fairfax, a Congregationalist who went to church several times on Sundays. Four of the first five editors between 1830-1903 were Protestant ministers of religion. Today the *Herald* is radically secular and treats Bible-based Christianity with contempt. Increasing numbers of people are following its anti-Christian lead.

However, the problem for atheists is that they have a lot of difficulty describing their ideal world without God. Clearly, communist-style countries aren't attractive to people like Richard Dawkins, Phillip Adams and Peter Fitzsimons. Nor are hard-right, capitalist, libertarian regimes that are weak on social justice. They just want liberal democracies based on Christian values without all the God-stuff. Their ideal society is based on a universe that is ruled by chance and where right and wrong have no objective existence. Such a scenario sounds like a pretty miserable place to me.

I think the job of the church is to tell

“We need to see our schools as distinctive Christian institutions that encourage open enquiry in search of the truth.”

Australians that the modern alternatives are hopeless and we need to get back to our roots in the Bible and the message of the gospel. The questions we have to answer are: Who is God and what does He expect of us? We learn this in the gospel.

Your own state, NSW, has a Christian Premier, Governor and Police Commissioner. Is that having an impact on the state?

No doubt it is, in all sorts of hidden ways, of which I am unaware. I respect each of these men and am thankful for them.

However, the secularist Andrews' Government in Victoria is quite bold in promoting its agenda. Scripture classes are no longer available in Victoria in school hours. Further, Bible correspondence courses have been banned in Victorian prisons although they are available in every other Australian state and in the Pacific nations.

The question I want to ask is: “Why is it acceptable for a leader to be motivated and directed by secularism but not acceptable for our Christian leaders to express their moral convictions directed by their faith?”

Again, a number of our federal leaders seem to be morally vacuous; they are electorally driven pragmatists. They claim to support traditional marriage and the family but they have declared their support for same-sex marriage too.

Those leaders who claim to be Christian need to provide unambiguous moral direction. What good is it to have them in office if they make so little difference?

I am sorry to say that in this Daniel Andrews seems to provide an example for the others to follow. He has the courage to follow his convictions, wrong as they are.

How do you think we got to this point? There seems to be momentum for change to traditional marriage. How did this come about so quickly?

I don't think it has been quick at all. When liberalism took over the church from the 1920s onwards, it created a moral vacuum.

I taught Sunday school in 1968. The material was devoid of any redemptive content, it was just “be good and do your best”, and that curriculum was imposed on all churches. Traditional morality was already on the way out even in the church.

The late Ronald Conway, in his book *The Land of the Long Weekend* says: “Formerly tough-minded Presbyterians capitulated rather mysteriously in the late 1950s to a view of ministry as a kind of spiritual psychotherapy....the world was connecting the church, rather than the church connecting the world.”

The moral vacuum became even worse with the arrival of the free love movement in the 1960s, the advent of the Pill and then abortion law reform. In 1973, when Senator Lionel Murphy became Attorney-General, his aim was to rid society of its Judeo-Christian influences. The centrepiece of his plan was contained in the Family Law Act 1975, which permitted a no-fault termination of marriage after 12 months of separation. All these events weakened marriage.

In the few decades since, a well-organised homosexual lobby has infiltrated the media and swayed public opinion so that increasing numbers of people now support same-sex marriage.

What are the essential Bible principles to grasp when we consider same sex marriage?

We must remember that marriage between a man and a woman is a key theme of the Bible. It is certainly not a book about homosexuality. It begins and ends with marriage (Genesis 2; Revelation 19).

God made man and woman different so as to complement one another in marriage and to practise life-long love

and faithfulness to each other. The union of marriage also involves sexual union through which a father and mother bring children into the world and nurture them. The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 24, states that marriage is only between one man and one woman. The Lord Jesus (Matthew 19) affirms marriage as always between a man and a woman.

The Bible also tells us about God, His purpose and will, how we rebelled against Him and how He enters history in the person of Jesus Christ to win us back. His purpose is to renew us so we can be like Him.

We should not forget that one aspect of our rebellion is to take sexual activity, a wonderful gift of God, outside marriage, where it becomes destructive. It's like petrol. It's good in a car, but potentially very dangerous outside of it.

Some say that what Paul condemns in Romans 1 are not homosexual relations as such, but unfaithful homosexual relations. What do you think?

Paul doesn't qualify his statement about homosexuality in Romans 1. What he condemns is the exchange of natural relations between a man and a woman for unnatural sexual activity between persons of the same-sex.

It is cultural arrogance to think that we are the first generation to have faithful homosexual relationships. There may have been homosexuals in the first century who remained committed to one another. However, that's not the point. Paul's argument is that such sexual activity is "unnatural". He uses the word "exchange" three times in Romans 1:23, 25, and 26 to indicate that people were abandoning "natural" sexual activity for that which is "indecent" and "unnatural". When people exchange the natural for the unnatural, Paul says, they are in a state of rebellion against God.

“Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews seems to provide an example for the others. He has the courage to follow his convictions, wrong as they are.”

What about those who ask why pay attention to the Bible when it speaks of homosexuality, when we don't heed the command “Don't boil a kid in its mother's milk” (Deut. 14:21)?

We need to read the Bible intelligently. Christians respect the Old Testament laws because they come from God. However, we need the help of Jesus Christ to interpret the law for us, as Origen said. We must read the food, sacrificial and moral laws through Christ's teaching. Both the Old and New Testament make it clear that homosexual activity is unacceptable to God. We must repent of it and, like all sin, leave it behind. That is not easy, but it's a necessary part of our obedience to Christ.

Now to point this out to practising homosexuals is neither hateful nor homophobic. In fact, it is kind if we believe that sin leads to eternal judgment.

By the way, we need to realise that some of the Old Testament food laws served a spiritual purpose beyond whatever immediate purpose they had. With respect to boiling a kid in its mother's milk, God not only forbade participating in a pagan ritual practice but He wanted us to know that it is utterly incongruous to take something like milk, meant by God for nurturing, and use it as an instrument of death.

Since God has made man and woman to complement each other, it is “unnatural” and contrary to His will to join man with man or woman with woman. Such unions cannot naturally produce children and they deny children the nurture of either their birth mother or father. Are we going to have a Sorry Day in, say, 2046 for children denied such nurture?

How can we prepare for the coming plebiscite?

The Government has committed itself to



David Cook

a process where every citizen must vote. The government will fund publishing the case for both the Yes and the No votes. A “majority vote” for same-sex marriage will trigger a change in the present legislation regulating marriage.

Senior politicians have told us how this is not just about marriages but also about freedom of speech and religious communication. Therefore the silent majority need to get active. If the plebiscite is lost it will change life in Australia, as it has in Canada, the USA and UK. This means we need to pray.

Ministers need to preach God's Word about family, marriage and sex. We must be able to critique the arguments for same-sex marriage. Surveys show that when the traditional position is argued well, waverers generally move to favour that position.

I believe this plebiscite is winnable. In the National Assembly of Austria last year a move in favour of same-sex marriage was overruled by 110 to 26. In Italy there has been massive public demonstration in favour of traditional marriage. 300,000 people marched against same-sex marriage last year in Rome.

We also need Christians to man the 6700 polling booths in Australia.

The homosexual lobby has actively opposed this plebiscite and they will now work to have it dealt with quickly. We need to pray that our leaders will give us sufficient freedom of speech and enough time for quiet considered reflection after the coming election before we have to vote.

I have written a number of columns on this and related issues at presbyterian.org.au.

Step right up

The church's challenge goes beyond same-sex marriage

Jared Hood

In an act of judicial treason, the US Supreme Court legalised same-sex marriage. My mind went to Roland Freisler, the head of Hitler's People's Court. Hang the constitution; ideology rules the day.

We don't know what Australia will decide in the promised plebiscite. We do know this: Christendom is dead. We mourn its demise. The darkness is well advanced.

What can the Church do to bring light into the present situation? The answer lies where it always does. Seek God in prayer. Seek genuine holiness. Seek to call many to repentance.

Something else is needed. I don't want to talk tactics for winning the plebiscite. Rather, have we ourselves understood what Scripture says about marriage? Has our woolly thinking rather made us complicit in the rise of support for same-sex marriage? Even as we make a rear-guard action to defend marriage, do we believe our own arguments?

Do we believe that marriage is about "love"? It sounds obvious. Two people love, so they marry. That's why I got married. That's why same-sex couples seek marriage.

It is a lie. "Love" here is a 19th century, Georgian-Victorian construct. Think of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. That romantic notion befitted the age. It kept discussion of male-female relationships prim and proper. It still permeates our culture—love as transcendent, the highest goal of life. Just turn the radio on.

Scripture barely speaks about it. How

often do we have to say "Love is an action, not a feeling" before we get the Victorian notion out of our heads?

What is marriage about in Scripture? Chiefly two things. First, it is about the physical relationship between a man and woman. Genesis comes straight to it: "one flesh". The main meaning is as obvious as Shakespeare's crude "beast with two backs".

Isn't *Song of Songs* romantic poetry? In every chapter, the physical relationship dominates. Solomon isn't salacious, but the book is deeply sensual.

Second, "one flesh" is at the core of marriage, but it's not the core. Before a husband eagerly brandishes AP in front of his wife saying, "Look what AP says marriage is about", keep reading. The singular, fundamental purpose of marriage is this: to have children.

The Church has made this connection when responding to same-sex marriage. Do we actually believe it and live it? When I got married, I didn't think it was about having children. It was low down the to-do list; something we could decide on later.

Honestly, I used to see Genesis 1:28 as pre-Christian. It says, "Be fruitful and multiply". Isn't Christianity more about evangelism? Jesus certainly gave the Great Commission, but here is His first

Great Commission: "Be fruitful and multiply."

Marriage exists for this. Male and female exists for this (Gen. 1:27). In the next age, maleness, femaleness, and marriage, won't matter (Mt 22:30). In this age, God says "procreate", and therefore there is "one-flesh" marriage.

Malachi 2:15 is definitive. Why did God ordain marriage? "He seeks godly offspring." Because of the Fall, not all marriages result in children, but children still are the reason for marriage. "Darling, I would like to fulfil Jesus' first Great Commission with you. Will you marry me?" How romantic.

The church rightly connects marriage to children in response to same-sex marriage. We rightly point out that same-sex marriage is a dead-end street. We rightly deploy evidentiary arguments that children fare better with a mum and dad. Our society might not tolerate rationality, but on the basis of revealed truth we rightly emphasise procreation and family.

The church has to live it, too, not just say it. Marriage and potentially children aren't options for when you're in your 30s. If you are male or female today, be intentional about both marriage and children.

This is not easy. Our feminised society

"How often do we have to say 'Love is an action, not a feeling' before we get the Victorian notion out of our heads?"

has broken down gender roles (hence the push for same-sex marriage). Women spend 13 or more years in education learning to be CEOs and Senior Counsels, not learning to be mums. Men learn to remain boys into their late 20s, with Playstations, picture story books (sorry, “graphic novels”), and the juvenility of internet pornography.

Women of the church need to step up. If God has called you to be a wife and mother—99% of women—don’t stoop to being only a CEO. You can be celibate for the Kingdom, but not for your career. Make career decisions that fit with motherhood, not vice versa. Motherhood is the goal – “she will be saved through childbearing” (1 Tim. 2:15). A Christian woman fulfils God’s plan and lives out her salvation by being a mother.

When someone asks what you do, don’t say, “I’m just at home with the kids”. There’s no just about it. Women are designed to be “home workers” (Titus 2:5). It’s biblical, it’s counter-cultural, it costs, society depends on it, and the church praises you for it (Prov. 31:28–31). But a CEO of Microsoft? Whatever.

Young men of the church need to step up. “When I became a man, I put away childish things” (1 Cor. 13:11). Move to employment quickly. Education is great, but don’t use it to delay growing up. University is not compulsory, or

“There is a cost to be counted, as with all Christian commitments. It costs to say no to society and yes to God’s Word.”

even Years 11 and 12. Aim for marriage. To get the woman you’ve chosen to love down the aisle, you’re going to need a life-plan to support her and your children. And don’t tell me you can remain sexually pure into your late 20s without marriage. Plan to become the “lord” of a new family (“lord” and “lady” in their original meanings: the lord is the “bread-keeper”; the lady is the “bread-maker”).

Disclaimer: the above is dangerous. There is a cost to be counted, as with all Christian commitments. It costs to say no to society and yes to God’s Word. Motherhood is tough. Women are not trained for it. New mothers can look bewildered as they hold their babies in their arms. Are we the dumbest of all species? We have forgotten how to raise our young. It’s going to take spiritual resolve to buck the societal trend.

And don’t just have children. They’ve got to be raised. God wants a “godly seed”. Don’t leave it to the state to raise them. Hosea 5:7 laments: “They have dealt treacherously with the Lord, for they have begotten pagan children.” When enrolling children in school, don’t ask the principal, “how many of

your students go on to university?” Ask “how many students survive your school with their faith intact?” and “how many thrive at your school in the fear and admonition of the Lord?” We’ve got to stop sacrificing children on the altar of education.

The church will need to step up, to help young men and women. Women need mothercraft skills—there’s a conference topic or two. Mothers need playgroups. Can older women help (Titus 2:3)? Men need a church culture that says the time for onesies and superhero T-shirts is over.

In the days after the US Supreme Court decision, I was heard to joke: “At least we can outbreed them.” I wasn’t really joking. Hannah, in 1 Samuel 1, sees a society fit for judgment, and she does something about it. She gives her son to the Lord, to be the leader that Israel needed, to be a Nazirite like powerful Samson (1:11). On more levels than one, “children” is the response to same-sex marriage. The Christian strategy is family.

Jared Hood lectures in Old Testament at the Presbyterian Theological College, Victoria.

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Heavens above

Where did you get that idea?

Bill Medley

Despite the recent aggressive push of some atheists, most people still believe in heaven. One of the practical difficulties in evangelism is not trying to get people to believe in the afterlife, but convincing them that heaven is not for everyone when they die and that Christianity is not just another of the many theories.

So where *did* you get the idea there is a heaven? Where did it come from? The “heaven” concept comes in handy when the family pet dog, poor old Rover, rolls over. What do you tell the kids? “It’s OK, Rover went to doggie heaven.” All the while we really know Rover is just a couple of feet below providing food for the worms!

Are we any better at a funeral when we try to comfort each other with: “Well, he’s in a better place now.” He or she is “sitting up there, smiling down on us from heaven”. We see it at the celebrity funeral. Some of the fiercest sceptics of religion suddenly become theologians! They are all so certain not only that heaven exists, but that the one who has just died has qualified to have gone there...”up there playing their music or sport up in the sky”.

How do they know that? Where does this idea of heaven come from?

Some say near-death experiences prove heaven. Dr Maurice Rawlings, a specialist in cardiovascular diseases, was chief of cardiology at Frankfurt General Hospital, Germany. He was able to collect enough data to show that NDEs are not universal. In his book *To Hell and Back*, Rawlings documents the fact that as many as half of NDEs are negative

experiences. Perhaps one of the most damning facts against NDEs being able to provide any certainty about heaven is that some people who have had more than one NDE have experienced both positive NDEs and very negative ones (heaven and hell as it were, but on separate occasions).

So where did you get the idea of heaven? Surely the answer must be religion. After all, don’t all the different religions believe in heaven? When we say at the funeral that he or she is “up there smiling down on us”, aren’t we just echoing a kind of universal human subconscious knowledge that world religions have always understood?

Despite the thousands of religions and sects, there are actually only five major world religions that have had a worldwide impact and have stood the test of time. They are the origin of most contemporary religions. Nevertheless, when we look at these religions, the idea of heaven as an ongoing personal and permanent existence is far from something on which they all agree.

Both Buddhism and Hinduism believe in reincarnation. This is not a personal ongoing existence, as we understand heaven. In fact the final hope of the afterlife for the Hindu and the Buddhist is not reincarnation itself. Reincarnation is the concept of being born back into this world for the purpose of punishment. As the Buddhist scriptures say: “All birth into this world, whether among animals, or above or below them, tends to ill and not to ease.”

The end goal for the Buddhist is finally to be set free from this judgment cycle

of reincarnation. Only when (and if) you escape being born back into this world are you delivered. But is this deliverance heaven as we normally define it? A place where you have permanent and personal ongoing existence as yourself? No, rather, the goal is to be *released* from the self. As the Buddhist scriptures teach: “Is final deliverance then possible outside this Dharma [teaching], and can it be won on the basis of non-Buddhist doctrines? – No it cannot, for all other teachings are corrupted by false ideas about a ‘self’.”

The idea of heaven, (a personal ongoing self in the afterlife), is corrupt and false, according to Buddhism. Similarly, the Hindu hope is to be finally “at one” with the great reality, Brahman, but not in a personal ongoing way. There are many various stopover existences (heavens or hells) but none of these are permanent. In Buddhism, “final deliverance” is nirvana, which literally means “extinction”: extinction from “thirst” or desire and, importantly, extinction from the self. Nirvana has been described as “a drop of water merging into the ocean”. As the Lankavatara Sutra says, “Nirvana is where the thinking-mind with all its discriminations, attachments, aversions and egoism is forever put away.”

So Nirvana is a release from personal existence and delusion of the “self”. No self-identity. No happy-chappy smiling down from heaven on us. No reuniting with others. So those people at the funeral who believe their lost loved one has gone on to be reunited with their friends are denying essential Buddhist teaching.

“Delusion alone ties one person to another ... Over a number of lives a person is no more firmly associated with his own people than birds who flock together at the close of day, some here, some there. Relatives are no more closely united than travellers who for a while meet at an inn, and then part again, losing sight of each other ... no one really belongs to anyone else.”

If heaven is a permanent place where you go when you die and continue on in bliss as yourself and reunite with others, then Hindus and Buddhists don't believe in heaven at all. We might ask why are so many people trying to push those poor Buddhists where they don't want to go!

Muslims, certainly believe in heaven but where did Islam get the idea of heaven? Muhammad claimed to be the last and greatest of all the Biblical prophets, following on from the prophets of the Jews and Christians. In fact there are dozens of verses in the Koran assuring the reader that the Bible of the Jews and Christians is in fact the

“If heaven is a permanent place where you continue on in bliss as yourself, then Hindus and Buddhists don't believe in heaven at all.”

word of God and that Muhammad's revelation was simply picking up where the Bible left off. Muhammad would have openly claimed that the foundational concept of heaven first came from the Bible.

Orthodox Jews believe the Old Testament of the Bible to be the word of God. The concept of heaven is far from fully developed in the Old Testament, but it is there in a shadowy form. It is only when we come to the teaching of Jesus in the New Testament of the Bible that we really learn about what we describe today as that “better place” we call heaven. Jesus spoke about heaven as a personal existence where people are reunited with one another. “I go to prepare a place for you.” “God will wipe away every tear”. “Many will join the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

Jesus even answers that classic old

sceptical question about heaven: “How could anyone really know if there is a heaven unless someone had been there and come back?” Answer: Jesus says, “I have!” “No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man (John 3:13)”.

So this place we call heaven, this beautiful picture of the afterlife where we have joyful personal ongoing existence, in the company of God and others ... where did you get the idea?

You got the idea from Jesus!

So if Jesus is the source of heaven, and if you think you are going to heaven when you die, wouldn't it be a good idea to at least check with the owner of the place before you presume you have your room booked?

Bill Medley is the minister at Frankston Presbyterian Church, Vic, and author of Heaven? Where Did You Get That Idea?



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World news

Whistleblowers charged

A grand jury convened to investigate whether a Houston Planned Parenthood clinic had sold the organs of aborted fetuses cleared the clinic and instead indicted the undercover videographers behind the allegations, surprising the officials who called for the probe.

The Harris County grand jury indicted David Daleiden and Sandra Merritt, both of California, on charges of tampering with a governmental record, a second-degree felony with a possible sentence of up to 20 years in prison. It also charged Daleiden, the leader of the videographers, with the same misdemeanour he had alleged – the purchase or sale of human organs, presumably because he had offered to buy in an attempt to provoke Planned Parenthood employees into saying they would sell.

The videographers, who had posed as employees of a company that buys

tissue and filmed interactions with Planned Parenthood executives, issued a statement saying they had not committed any crimes.

“The Centre for Medical Progress uses the same undercover techniques that investigative journalists have used for decades in exercising our First Amendment rights to freedom of speech and of the press, and follows all applicable laws,” the statement said, adding, “Planned Parenthood still cannot deny the admissions from their leadership about foetal organ sales captured on video for all the world to see.”

Houston Chronicle

China ‘most Christian’ soon

Within 15 years, China should become the country with the most Christians in the world, according to a study. Fenggang Yang, of Purdue University, predicts that China will reach 224 million Christians by the year 2030, as

quoted in Britain’s *Financial Times*.

“By my calculations China is destined to become the largest Christian country in the world very soon,” said Yang, an expert in sociology and author of *Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule*. “It is going to be less than a generation. Not many people are prepared for this dramatic change.”

The explosion of Christianity in China will upend the traditional Christian powerhouses of the world (in 2010, the U.S. had around 159 million Protestants).

Currently, there are about 100 million Christians in the world’s most populous nation, which eclipses the 86.7 million-strong membership of the ruling Communist party, according to the *Financial Times*.

Assist News Service

3000-year-old fabric found

Israeli archaeologists have discovered fragments of “remarkably preserved” 3000-year-old fabrics, leather and seeds dating to the era of the biblical kings David and Solomon.

This is the first discovery of textiles dating from the 10th century B.C. “and therefore provides the first physical evidence” of what residents of the Holy Land wore, said Erez Ben-Yosef, the lead archaeologist with the Tel Aviv University excavation team that did the dig.

The excavation, carried out in southern Israel at the ancient copper mines of Timna — believed by many to be the site of King Solomon’s mines — took place in late January and February. The textiles, just 5-by-5 centimeters in size, are the remnants of clothing, tents, ropes, cords and bags. They were preserved thanks to Timna’s extremely dry conditions, the archaeologist said.

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Vanessa Workman, a member of the excavating and analysis team, said the Hebrew Bible is chock-full of references to fabrics and dyes. She said the discovery "is an affirmation" of biblical texts. "It brings the desert culture of that period alive."

Religion News Service

Intolerance rising in Asia

Religious and ethnic intolerance rose throughout the Asia-Pacific region in 2015 due to discriminatory government policies, according to an Amnesty International report.

"Some authorities [in the region] colluded in, or failed to address, an increasing trend of religious and ethnic intolerance, exclusion and discrimination," London-based Amnesty International said in its annual assessment of human rights around the world.

"Abuses were reported in countries in the Asia-Pacific region including Laos, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam," said the report, which also underlined failures by the Indonesian government to protect the country's religious minority groups, including Christians in Aceh province.

UCA

Christians denounce killings

Protestant and Catholic leaders in Indonesia's easternmost province of Papua have denounced a series of killings and have urged an end to the violence in the troubled region.

In one incident four separatists were allegedly tortured and shot to death by Indonesian security officers on Yapen Island, then, in another killing, a Papuan was allegedly shot dead by a soldier.

The Rev. Socratez Sofyan Yoman, chairman of the Communion of Baptist Churches in Papua, expressed concern about the shootings. "These shootings are ignoble acts and cruel crimes. We denounce such incidents. (The government) must end them," he said.

Muslims save Christians

A group of Muslims travelling on a bus in the north east of Kenya took a stand against gun-wielding Islamists, refusing to point out who on their bus were Christian despite the terrorists threatening to kill them all.

Shukri Farah, driver of the bus, said the Muslims stood on either side of the Christians, to shield them from view. Passengers had swapped clothes, he said, to allow the Christians to blend in.

Ten Shabaab fighters near Mandera sprayed the bus with bullets, injuring the

driver in the leg and forcing the bus to a halt. But the Muslims on board defied demands from the attackers to help identify Christians travelling with them.

The Telegraph

Hindu claim 'baseless'

Christian leaders in India are disputing claims made by a Hindu nationalist group that talks are underway to set up a Christian organisation within its structure to forge closer ties between the two religious communities.

A leader of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS national volunteer corps) Hindu group told local media that a December meeting between Christian leaders and RSS functionaries in New Delhi was the first step. The alleged move comes amid accusations the RSS, along with its political wing, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are stoking a climate of intolerance against minority religions in India.

Christian leaders say the claim is baseless, politically motivated and aimed at dividing Christians.

UCA

Christians remove opium

A growing Christian activist movement in Myanmar's Kachin state is determined to rid the war-torn area of one of its major crops, the poppies used for opium and heroin production. Known as Pat Jasan, the anti-drug movement was established two years ago by the Kachin Baptist Church.

Made up mostly of ethnic Kachin, Pat Jasan began clearing poppy fields two years ago but put their efforts on hold in January after one of their members was killed and three others injured. A 19-year-old Kachin man was shot dead by a sniper suspected to be the owner of a poppy field that the group was clearing.

Despite this, the group – described by some as vigilantes – managed to destroy around 3500 acres worth of poppy fields in two townships during that month. Myanmar is the world's second largest opium producer after Afghanistan. Opium production brings in nine to 15 times more money per hectare than rice, according to a 2011 opium survey by the United Nations.

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Violence rising in India

On average, Indian Christians reported being subjected to violent attacks for every day of 2015 but the actual number of such incidents would be much higher.

All across India, there were over 365 reported incidents against Christians last year, including seven cases of murder, according to the Mumbai-based Christian rights group Indian Christian Persecution's annual report. Other offences included rape, the vandalism of churches, and the disruption of worship and services.

The reported incidents against Indian Christians "are miniscule compared to the actual ground zero reality, where we work," said Joseph Dias who is the group's director.

UCA

Church with no strings

A Chinese Christian congregation has dedicated its new church, shaped like a giant violin. The Yanbu Church, nicknamed the "violin church", was dedicated in Foshan, Guangdong province, according to UPI.

The seven-story building includes living quarters for preachers and guest rooms for visitors.

The Rev. Yu Qing, an official with the church, was quoted by the *China Christian Daily* as saying the church's design is meant to evoke the need for practice, an important part of both musicianship and Christianity.

Iran frees pastor

Saeed Abedini has finally been freed. The Iranian-American pastor from Idaho, held for more than three years, was exchanged as part of a prisoner swap in which Iran released four people and the United States released seven.

"This has been an answer to prayer," his wife, Naghmeh, said in a press release from the American Centre for Law and Justice, one of Abedini's leading advocates. "This is a critical time for me and my family. We look forward to Saeed's return and want to thank the millions of people who have stood with us in prayer during this most difficult time."

More than 1.1 million people had joined ACLJ's "Save Saeed" campaign. President Obama personally told

Naghmeh last year that freeing her husband was "a top priority".

Christianity Today

New claim against Driscoll

The pastor whose Seattle megachurch imploded two years ago now is accused of raising funds for overseas missionaries and spending it at home, among other allegations.

Four former members of the now-defunct Mars Hill Church are suing its controversial former pastor Mark Driscoll, accusing him of "a continuing pattern of racketeering activity". The 42-page civil racketeering lawsuit was filed on February 29 and comes as Driscoll recently announced he is starting a new church in Phoenix.

The suit alleges that millions donated by church members to support missionaries overseas appear to have stayed in the U.S. It also claims the church paid \$210,000 to a company called Result Source to land Driscoll's book, *Real Marriage: The Truth about Sex, Friendship and Life Together* on the best-seller lists of *The New York Times* and others.

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A spiritual check-up

Test yourself against the lessons from Psalm 23

Irene Howat



The 23rd psalm is the best known of all the psalms and it may well be among the most familiar passages of Scripture. We turn to it when we need comfort, assurance, a warm hug. But it can also be used by Christians as a check-up of their spiritual health.

“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall lack nothing.”

Although this psalm is sung widely by those who would not profess a personal faith in God, it is clear from its very first sentence that only those who believe can appropriate the words to themselves. So the first item on our health checklist is this – Is the Lord my Shepherd? Have I come to Him in repentance and faith and accepted His free gift of salvation?

“He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul?”

The psalmist is aware of what is going on around him. He engages his God-given senses. Looking around, he sees the green pastures (actual and figurative). When he listens he hears no sound for the waters are still. Examining his thinking, David knows intellectually that his soul is restored and he feels it in his heart. Are we sensitive (do we use our senses?) to God’s provision, refreshment and restoration? And do

we thank Him for these blessings?

“He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.”

By and large David’s life was one of following God’s guidance. When he did not, he paid for it sorely. We do well to follow his example in seeking guidance and we certainly can’t take it for granted. While God guides us for our good, note that it is also for a greater good – it is for the glory of His name. Do we pray for guidance and seek it in the Bible? And does that show on our faces as we reflect something of the glory of Jesus?

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil ...”

David knew many valleys that must have cast shadows over him, especially during the years when King Saul trailed him like a demented terrier. When death casts its long shadow over us do we look to God to deal with our fears? Notice that David doesn’t say that the evil goes away, it’s the fear that God deals with and, unless He comes soon, we will all have to walk through that dark valley. But we need not be fearful.

“... for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”

The fear David felt was real but so was the presence of God, and it was His presence that relieved the king’s fear. It

is interesting that the psalmist saw God’s rod and staff as comforts. They were, in the same way that parental rules are a comfort to a teenager. They assure him of boundaries but he often doesn’t like them. David had learned to be comforted by God’s disciplining hand. Have we?

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”

Here we have a picture of God Himself being our host and catering for our needs despite an enemy presence. In fact, it could be seen as a victory feast as Christ has already won the war, although His enemies have still to discover they are defeated foes.

Believers are foreigners in the world and still engaged in the battle, though the victory is secure. Foreigners are not always welcome. They can feel threatening. Part of the reason that militant secularists are so against Christians is that we present a threat, and as long as we base our speech, lives and works on the Bible we will continue to do so. Had I read the last few sentences 10 years ago I would have thought it was over-reactive. But times have changed and I am now convinced that those who warned us then were not extremists but prophets, men and women who read the times correctly in the light of God’s Word. Does this thought depress and frighten us? Or are we aware of our total security in Jesus and total provision by Him, and that nothing can wrench us out of God’s hand?

“Are we sensitive (do we use our senses?) to God’s provision, refreshment and restoration? And do we thank Him for these blessings?”

“You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.”

Is David thinking back over the years to Samuel pouring the oil of consecration over his head? That was a long time before he wrote this psalm and much had happened for good and ill. But he sums it all up in the recognition that his cup overflows. There are those for whom a half-full cup is half empty. David was not one of them. His experience of God’s goodness was not merely adequate; he knew that it had overflowed into each and every corner of his need. Consecration, his and ours, does not promise an easy life but it is the recipe for a blessed life. Do we look back with gratitude or complaints?

Oil is also a symbol of joy. Such was David’s joy that on at least one occasion his wife was embarrassed by him. Are we joyful Christians?

“Surely goodness and love (mercy) will follow me all the days of my life ...”

The late Rev. Douglas MacMillan of the Free Church of Scotland used to

talk of goodness and mercy as being like two sheepdogs coming up behind us, running from side to side to keep us moving forward and sometimes nipping us on the heels to set us in the right direction. Sometimes God uses our fellow believers to fill the role of sheepdogs. Are we amenable to correction and guidance by those who are further along their Christian pilgrimage than we are, and sometimes by those who are newly on the road but whose zeal and vision put us to shame?

“... and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

From sitting at a table hosted by the Lord, we now move to think of eternal residence in His heavenly home. David here is looking forward, and we can do that too. But do we? Are we too caught up with cares and concerns to look forward to that great day when we will see Jesus face-to-face?

When we are buying a new house we pore over the estate agent’s schedule, noting every little detail in anticipation of making that house our home. Do we allow

ourselves the enjoyment of reading what the Bible has to say about heaven and try to imagine ourselves at home there?

“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language ... And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’” (Revelation 7:1-9).

John’s vision was of heaven after the Lord’s coming in glory. That means that when John saw all those who will then be in heaven, he saw us, for we were there.

Later in his vision John tells us, “God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (21:3-4).

What is there not to enjoy about that as we look forward in sure and certain hope?

Scottish author Irene Howat’s books include Pain, my Companion and the Ten Boys and Ten Girls series.

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A mere liaison

How abortion cost marriage its special character

Phil Burcham

“It’s tough to make predictions, especially about the future” is widely attributed to either the US baseball star Yogi Berra or the Danish physicist Neils Bohr. The witty quotation reminds us of a truth that is very relevant to the Christian life: since even the best human minds are subject to great limitations and profound ignorance, we should stop trying to predict the future and leave our destinies in the hands of the Lord.

That said, Scripture does sometimes commend the making of certain kinds of predictions about the future. Christ, for example, often spoke against a naïve and obtuse state of mind that refuses to predict the undeniable consequences accompanying transgression of God’s law.

In one evocative encounter with the Pharisees and Sadducees, Christ chided them for being so preoccupied with meteorological phenomena that they failed to see the evidence of Divine activity within their own society:

“When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times” (Matt 16:3, ESV).

While we must always be on guard against a legalistic mentality, there are times when Christians must follow Scripture and simply affirm that “the way of the transgressor is hard” (Prov 13:15). The Church’s abiding mission includes reminding the world that

transgressing God’s righteous standards needlessly magnifies the collective unhappiness of humanity.

Along with other Australians of my vintage or older, I have witnessed a spectacular erosion of the status of marriage in my lifetime. The 1960s Perth of my childhood was a pretty conservative place and I am just old enough to remember people using such terms as “living in sin” rather than “co-habitation”, or speaking of “adultery” rather than “extramarital relationships”, of “smutty books” instead of “adult literature”.



The causes of this profound moral revolution are worth pondering. What social factors caused respect for marriage to dissipate so rapidly that support for same sex marriage is now entrenched across the political spectrum?

Although we rarely attribute the modern marriage crisis to the recent acceptance of abortion, a remarkable passage in one of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s greatest books, *Ethics*, suggests he foresaw this sad possibility. Much of this unfinished work was written while the great



Lutheran pastor was on the run during the terminal phase of the Third Reich. This fearful context likely supplied a moral clarity and insight which is often lacking in our more comfortable times.

As Bonhoeffer noted, “Marriage involves acknowledgment of the right of life that is to come into being, a right which is not subject to the disposal of the married couple. Unless this right is acknowledged as a matter of principle, marriage ceases to be marriage and becomes a mere liaison.”

“A mere liaison” – Bonhoeffer’s turn of phrase nicely predicts the attitudes toward marriage that came to prevail within Western societies. Marriage has become such a loose and unbinding thing that it can be entered into by any two parties – and exited from – in the manner of a temporary liaison or as a matter of whim and personal convenience.

The fact that this nihilistic view ascended within societies that only recently abolished legal restraints upon abortion seems confirmatory of Bonhoeffer’s prophecy. Abortion is so destructive of the logic of marriage – a primary purpose of which is to create a safe and stable environment for the next generation of humans – that it leaves the entire institution lacking any moral footing whatsoever.

We should follow Bonhoeffer’s lead and spend more time thinking and speaking boldly about the profound social changes that have accompanied the Abortion Revolution.

Phil Burcham is an academic and elder in the PCWA.

“Marriage has become such a loose and unbinding thing that it can be entered into by any two parties – and exited from – as a matter of whim and personal convenience.”

Hospitable hearts

It's not about impressing people, but following God's example.

Madeleine Turner



More than 20 years ago, a shy, humble, elderly man transformed the fellowship at our 6pm church service. How did he do it? He brought a packet of biscuits and Butter Menthols to church. Until that point, people didn't stay around for "supper". But little did this elderly man foresee the impact his simple act of hospitality would make.

I will never forget the way Vic quietly shuffled around the building each Sunday, wearing his familiar brown coat and carrying a plastic bag full of goodies. With the very little that he had, he showed great generosity and love to those around him. After a while, the culture of fellowship changed. People began to stick around for longer and others joined Vic, bringing their own supper to share. Fellowship blossomed as friendships strengthened over cups of tea and a humble packet of biscuits.

One of the great temptations we have with hospitality is our need to impress people. With celebrity chefs and lifestyle gurus raising the bar very high, we can easily become consumed with expert tips on how to "dazzle" our guests. Which is rather difficult to do these days, given the ubiquity of self-professed "foodies" and hipster coffee

snobs. Is it any wonder that we find hospitality so burdensome?

Scripture has a different approach to hospitality from what we might read in *Vogue Living* magazine or watch on *Better Homes and Gardens*. Hospitality isn't about house, food or furniture. Nor is it a special gift given to the gourmet cooks or extroverts among us. Hospitality is a posture of the heart. It is showing kindness in welcoming strangers or guests. It involves opening our hearts, hands and homes to whoever God places across our paths. God calls all Christians to practise hospitality (1 Pet. 4:9; Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2). Why? Because God has extended hospitality to us.

In the Old Testament, God brought the Israelites out of Egypt – strangers that they were – and made a home for them (Lev. 19:33-34). In the New Testament, we see the ultimate act of hospitality when Christ died for sinners to make everyone who believes a member of God's household (Rom. 15:7; Eph. 2:5). Therefore as image-bearers of Christ, we are to reflect the glory of God's grace by offering hospitality to others. In other words, "Be holy, because I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16).

If we're honest with ourselves, we're

better at grumbling about hospitality than we are at practising it. But if we are truly convinced of hospitality's vital part of our love for God's people and our witness to the world, then we will not merely practise it, but *pursue* it.

Of course, we are all in different seasons of our lives and this affects how hospitable we can be. It also means that hospitality will look different for different people. For the mother with young children, hospitality may simply involve play dates, baby-sitting other peoples' kids or bringing a meal over to someone in need. For the busy working man or woman, taking someone out for lunch, bringing morning tea to work or inviting others out for weekend breakfast are different ways of practising hospitality. For the elderly living in a retirement village, hospitality may be something as simple as chatting to other residents or sharing a cup of tea.

Whichever way we go about it, the goal is not to put the spotlight on us, but rather, to magnify Christ's name. Who knows how God will use your simple act of hospitality to bless others and ultimately bring Him glory.

Madeleine Turner worships at Ashfield Presbyterian Church

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Rediscovering Prayer

Prayer in the Old Testament

Gary Millar

In the first part of this series (*AP Summer*), we saw that, from the beginning of the Bible, prayer is basically asking God to come through on His promises (Gen. 4:26). In the generation of Enosh, people start to pray because they see both God's commitment to us, and their own helplessness. In other words, from the very beginning, prayer has been gospel-shaped. This basic perspective on prayer is reflected in almost every part of the Old Testament.

Prayer in the Pentateuch is surprisingly scarce, but when Abraham and his family pray, they are asking God to come through on His covenant commitments. So Abraham prays (foolishly) that Ishmael might be his heir (17:18), both the unnamed servant of Abraham and Isaac himself pray for the success of the "wife project" in Genesis 24-25, and then Jacob memorably prays in Genesis 32: "And Jacob said, 'O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who said to me, "Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good", I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Please deliver me from the hand of my

brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. But you said, "I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude".'" (Gen 32:9-12, ESV)

For Jacob, prayer is clearly asking God to do what He has promised, which involves protecting him so that the promises to his grandfather Abraham

on the bricks and mortar but on the progress of God's work in the world. In Hezekiah's prayers, even when he focuses on his own misfortunes, God's response graciously redirects him to the progress of His plans in the world. Similarly, the prayers in Daniel 9 and Nehemiah 9 barely touch on the circumstances or needs of the individuals praying, but cry to the Lord to continue to roll out His promises on

"Prayer is never less (and seldom more) than asking God to do what He has promised."

might be fulfilled. This basic perspective is replicated in almost every prayer in the pages that follow.

The Exodus begins with a prayer like this (Ex. 2:23-25), and Moses' interactions with God throughout the journey are characterised by this concern that God do what He has promised (see Num. 14:13-20). Joshua picks up where Moses leaves off (Josh 7:6-9) and is reflected in the cycle of prayers for deliverance in the middle of judgment in Judges. Prayer is never less (and seldom more) than asking God to do what He has promised.

This is even more striking when one considers the big prayers of the Old Testament. Hannah's prayer in the wake of God ending her barrenness surprisingly focuses not on her own child, but on God's commitment to work in our world by sending a rescuer (1 Sam 2:1-10). When Solomon prays at the dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8), he remarkably does not focus

the stage of world history. Even the angst-ridden "confessions" of Jeremiah (e.g. Jer 12:1-12) derive their tension from the fact that God is apparently not doing what He has promised.

By the end of the Old Testament, the need to cry out to Yahweh, pleading with Him to act is very clear. Chronicles, for example, records 10 more specific prayers than the comparable sections of Kings. In each case, the prayers focus on asking God to do His work in the world. Or to express it differently, the prayers are gospel-shaped.

In the next issue, I will show how the special case of the Psalms fits squarely into this understanding of prayer in the Old Testament, before finishing off this series by outlining how Jesus both models this kind of prayer and teaches us to take up His words as we call on the name of the Lord.

Gary Millar is principal of the Queensland Theological College

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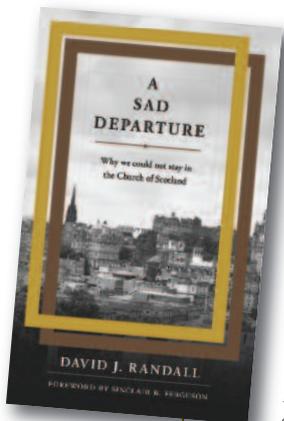
A Sad Departure Why we could not stay in the Church of Scotland

David J. Randall

Banner of Truth,
2015.

Peter Barnes

This is indeed a sad book. In May 2009 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland decided that a congregation at Aberdeen could call a pastor who had divorced his wife and was living in a homosexual relationship. Rank heresy was then followed by the triumph of “weasel words”, as in the 2013 General Assembly which voted to “affirm the



Church’s historic and current doctrine and practice in relation to human sexuality; nonetheless permit those Kirk Sessions who wish to depart from that doctrine and practice to do so”. This is yet another example of theological liberals taking refuge in illogical jabberwocky. David Cook from Australia rightly lamented: “Our mother Church has tragically left the family home.”

The schisms and secessions in Scotland in the 18th century and up to the end of the 19th century were largely to do with the issue of patronage – whether a patron could impose his will on a congregation by calling the particular minister of his choice. With the onset

of higher biblical criticism, however, the issue shifted from patronage to the authority of the Bible.

How the gospel is to be proclaimed in Scotland in the years to come is in God’s hands. It is difficult to attach much hope in the misplaced confidence of those in the Covenant Fellowship who have tried to uphold some kind of orthodoxy, but reassured their liberal opponents that they stand firmly against any secession. One can only sympathise with Randall’s conclusion: “This sad departure from Scripture necessitates a sad departure from the denomination.”

Peter Barnes is editor of AP.

The Genesis Account

Jonathan Sarfati

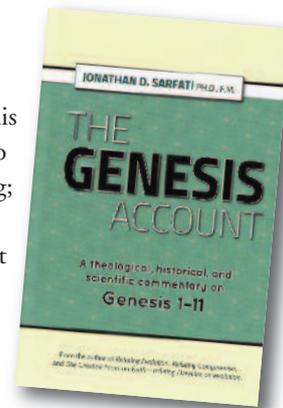
Creation Ministries International,
2015.

Paul Seiler

The reading of this commentary is no small undertaking; it contains some 700 pages – but it is very much worth the effort. Sarfati does a brilliant job of bringing the latest scientific knowledge to bear upon the topic of origins, as set forth in Genesis. One of the most impressive characteristics of this commentary is the very high regard it holds for the authority of God’s word.

Sarfati is a scientist, but his expertise as a scientist is combined with his ability to integrate genuine science with the biblical text. Many commentaries on Genesis treat scientific hypotheses as though they were of equal authority to Scripture, not so this commentary.

I would highly recommend it to any pastor and to Christians in general. I found many of Jonathan Sarfati’s



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scientific conclusions most enlightening, and was deeply challenged at some points concerning my own fuzzy and wrong thinking about the biblical doctrine of creation. For example, his commentary cured me of my soft gap theory. I think that his arguments for a young earth are very convincing.

This commentary demonstrates a superior command of the Hebrew text of Genesis. It is also infused by Sarfati's grasp of ancient Christian interpretations of Genesis, as well as Jewish interpretations. Not all will agree, but I was particularly interested to read his views on the very difficult reference to the identity of the "sons of God" in Genesis 6. Sarfati argues the case that this is a reference to angels.

Since the middle of the 19th century with the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, the church has been intimidated and led into compromise over the doctrine of creation. Now, Christians can have this excellent commentary sitting on their bookshelf, which they can use to defend the Biblical doctrine of creation.

Paul Seiler is minister at Annerley Presbyterian Church.

Hosanna, Loud Hosannas

David and Barbara Leeman

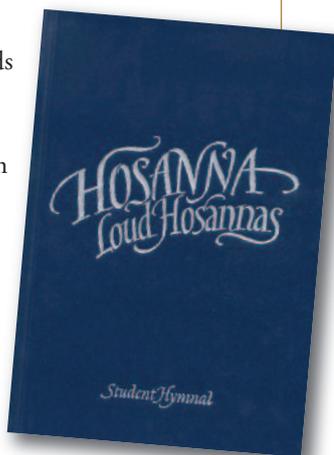
Self-published, 2014

Chris Ashton

If present trends continue, the future of Presbyterianism in Australia is unlikely to include another hymnbook. But maybe it should – if not for the

sake of baby boomer pastors and their dislike of the great hymns of the faith, then perhaps for the sake of our covenant children. Which brings us to one of the most unique children's resources available, the *Hosanna, Loud Hosannas* student hymnal.

Hosanna, Loud Hosannas is Smyth



Sewn and altogether beautifully manufactured and presented. Arranged thematically in traditional order, each entry features a Bible passage, the text of the hymn set to the melody line and, uniquely, an adjacent page of detailing the history and inspiration for music and lyrics, and a short devotional that Christian parents, teachers and children will find helpful.

As to the selection, the canon of 115 are, as the subtitle rightly says, "essentially hymns every child should sing". Holy catholicity is emphasised, not only by the historical notes, but also by the chronological range of the hymns, the oldest of which dates back to the 12th century (*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*) and the newest, the 21st century (*Come, People of the Risen King*). Given the appropriate attention paid to tunes, the lack of a tune index surprised me, as did the absence of even suggested tunes for the selection of psalms – which I would have loved to have seen versified, and not just provided in a responsive arrangement.

But this is an amazing book, with an important function. As Keith and Kristyn Getty write in their foreword, despite the "highly involved, complex, mystical" character of modern children's literature, "much current children's theological teaching, songs, and even worship to Almighty God can be so simplistic and shallow rather than telling the ascendant and beautiful story of Christ". *Hosanna, Loud Hosannas* seeks to do the latter in the timeless, beautiful, and aesthetically appropriate language of the Church Vocal.

Luther said that after his Bible, his hymnal was his most prized possession, a sentiment evidently not shared by many in the PCA. I'm not sure if my breakfast table humming of *A Mighty Fortress* is helpful here, but what a sweet kindness from God it would be – to this father and to the church – if my daughter and son were with Luther on this one.

Available from www.studenthymnal.com.

Chris Ashton is pastor at Penshurst Presbyterian Church, NSW.

The Wisdom of Islam and the Foolishness of Christianity

Richard Shumack

Island View Publishing, 2014.

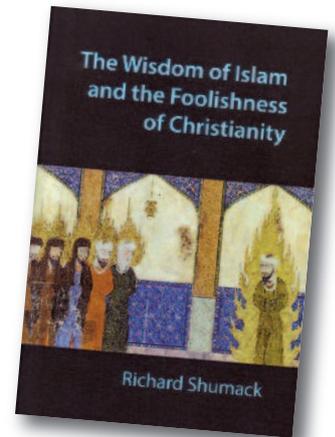
Peter Barnes

Richard Shumack has a Muslim friend, Shabbir Akhtar, to whom he replies in this book. Akhtar sees the

doctrines of Christianity as irrational, its ethics as impractical, and its offer of free grace as implausible. To Akhtar, divine education and natural theology should be enough to convince the world of the truth of Islam. Shumack responds that the reasonable is not always true (e.g. the world is not flat) and human beings are more than weak. We are sinful, so Sharia is not sufficient to transform us; we need the Spirit to work within us (e.g. Jer.31:31-34).

Shumack covers the Islamic underestimation of the potency of human sin; its attack on the doctrine of the Trinity as "gibberish" (to cite Ahmed Deedat); its view that the incarnation is incoherent and nonsensical; its rejection of the cross as historical and as immoral; its view of revelation as by dictation; and its optimistic assessment of Islamic achievements in politics and justice. Each issue is dealt with fairly and cogently.

There are few books on the subject of reaching Muslims with the gospel that are better than this one. In content and in tone, it is admirable, and will be an encouragement to Christians to evangelise our Muslim friends in a fruitful way. The only possible criticism (apart from a few typos) concerns the level to which the book is pitched. Shabbir Akhtar is probably rather atypical in his commitment to philosophical engagement with Christians, and this leads Shumack to



be somewhat sophisticated in his response. All that is meant by this is that there will be many Muslims – and Christians too – who may not cope with the philosophical arguments. But overall, this is quite splendid, and to be applauded.

More Valuable Than Gold The Philanthropy of John and Ann Goodlet

Paul F. Cooper

Eider Books, 2015

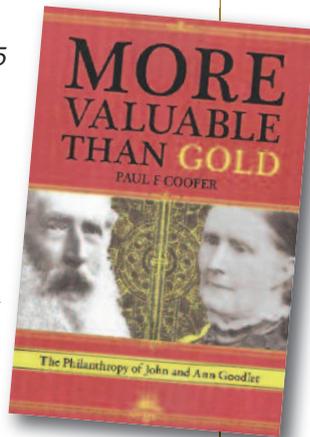
Peter Hastie

Paul Cooper's recent book, *More Valuable Than Gold – The Philanthropy of John and Ann Goodlet*, is a masterful and penetrating social history that focuses on the lives of two lesser-known Sydney-siders and members of Ashfield Presbyterian Church who played a prominent role in the development of philanthropy in Australian society from 1855 to 1914.

Relying on extensive contemporary sources, Cooper paints a vivid picture of how two dedicated Christians used their earthly treasure in wise and imaginative ways to demonstrate the love of God in a society where few made fortunes and many were haunted by the prospect of financial failure. The story of their unbounded generosity becomes even more remarkable against the severity of the great depression of the 1890s when so many were hard-pressed and so much wealth was destroyed in strikes, business collapses and bank failures.

The title of the book is taken from the words of Sir Henry Parkes, the then premier of NSW, and perhaps the most dominant figure in 19th century Australian politics. His own estimate was that because of their generosity and service John and Ann Goodlet were of far greater value to Australian society than the vast treasures of gold that lay beneath its soil.

One of the strengths of this book is that it causes us to reflect on the virtue of



philanthropy in its various dimensions. Philanthropy, which means “the love of humankind”, involves far more than mere feeling and good intentions. It includes a spectrum of activities that differ both in the purpose and principles upon which they operate.

It is generally regarded that there are four traditions of philanthropy to consider: first, philanthropy as “relief”, where the principal object is to mitigate human suffering; second, philanthropy as “improvement”, where the purpose is to empower the individual to maximise his/her potential; third, philanthropy as “reform”, whereby the burdens of people's lives are lifted by solving social problems and eliminating injustice; and, fourth, philanthropy as “civic engagement”, where one pursues

the welfare of a community by developing better structures and services for people.

There is a further and oft-forgotten dimension to philanthropy, spiritual engagement, which arguably lies at the root of all true philanthropy, although secular writers invariably overlook it. It was this quality that was the impulse that inspired John and Ann Goodlet to support care for the sick, Christian education, missionary endeavour, church planting as well as many other noble causes.

In reminding us of these various dimensions of philanthropy, we can see how much of our giving is skewed and fails to achieve a holistic balance. One of the remarkable aspects of this study is the way in which Cooper highlights the exemplary role of the Goodlets in their deep appreciation of human need, their active involvement in charitable concerns, and how they created many lasting benevolent institutions.

Since we are meant to imitate Jesus, who is described as constantly “doing good” (Acts 10:38), and since the apostle Paul reminds us “to devote ourselves to doing good” (Titus 2:14; 3:1, 8, 14), this ground-breaking study provides us with an invaluable and

authentic Australian story of how Christians today might find inspiration to give wisely and liberally to make the world a better place.

Peter Hastie, principal of the PTC Victoria, was minister of Ashfield Presbyterian Church from 1987 to 2011.

Faith Seeking Understanding Vital Lessons from Psalm 73

Iain D. Campbell

Banner of Truth, 2015.

Peter Barnes

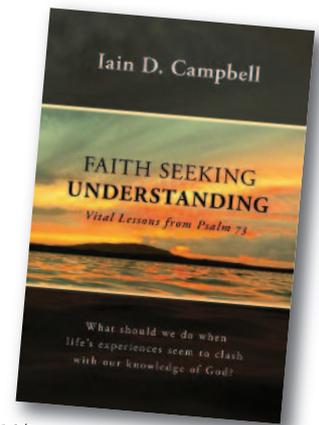
Psalm 73 is a psalm attributed to Asaph who goes through a period where his theology and his

experience do not coincide. He knows that God is good to true Israel, but he envies what he perceives to be the easy lives of the wicked. Only when he enters the sanctuary does he see their end, and recognise afresh that in the Day of Judgment no one will envy the wicked.

In just 30 pages, Iain Campbell takes the reader through the Psalm as finally Asaph's quandary is resolved. The result is clear, uplifting and pastorally very helpful. One of Campbell's comments is particularly pertinent: “Part of the tragedy of contemporary evangelicalism is that the church is so much a carbon copy of the culture around us that people come into it and get only what they have been getting every other day of the week. As a minister of the gospel I don't want my people to get that when they come for worship. I want them to enter the eternity where God dwells.”

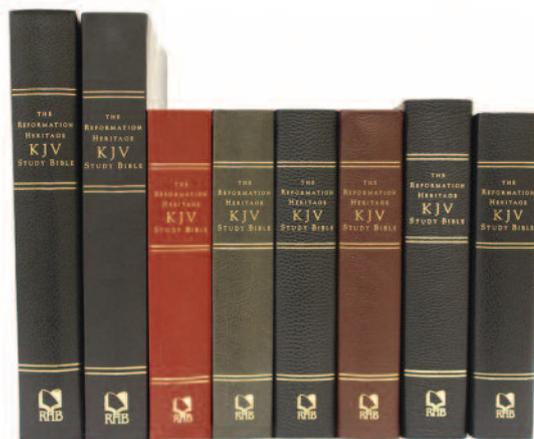
Asaph's troubled soul was healed only by the truth and experience of God. This little exposition of Psalm 73 will encourage believers who are going through dark times – and perhaps also give some unbelievers an insight into the breadth of the Word of God.

Many of these books are available at Reformers Bookshop, phone: (02) 9564 3555 web: reformers.org.au



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A public scandal

Christians concede far too much to secular morality

As Western society becomes more bullying in its attitude towards Christians, there has been an increasing tendency on the part of many believers to be content with arguing for our space in the public square. There has been a reluctance to call on unbelievers to repent, and even an assumption that unbelievers cannot be expected to hold the same moral views as Christians.

It is true that without the Holy Spirit, the Christian message will simply seem to be foolishness to those who hear it (1 Cor. 2:14). However, God has written His moral law on the hearts of all human beings (Rom. 2:12-16), which means all have a responsibility to adhere to it.

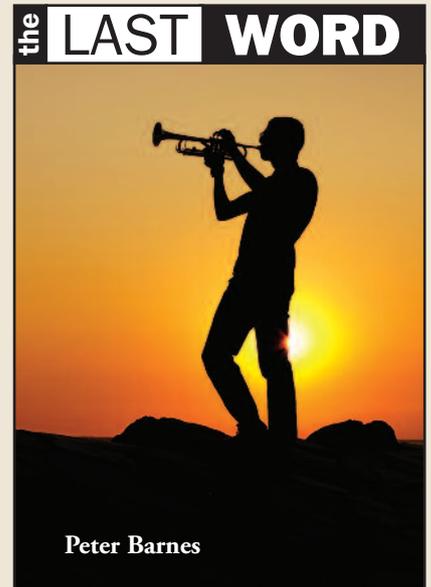
Every human being is made in God's image, and has His law written on his or her heart, and testified to by conscience. If someone is guilty of murder or stealing, we expect to agree that such a person needs to be called to account. If someone is obnoxious, and pushes in ahead of others in a queue, we all dislike such behaviour for moral reasons.

No Christian argues: "We do not wish

to impose Christian standards on unbelievers. There is a separation between church and state, and we do not want a theocracy." It is a universal given that murder and stealing are crimes to be punished, and that being pushy is somehow wrong.

A secular ethic is not neutral. If we say something is morally neutral, we are saying that it is allowable, and that will be heard as saying it is therefore moral. It will be put in the category of subjective likes and dislikes, along with what one thinks of beetroot and what is one's favourite colour.

God calls the nations to account in the Old Testament (e.g. Amos 1:1-2:3). Yahweh used the idolatrous and brutal Assyrians to chastise His own people of Israel (Isa. 10:5-7), but then judged the Assyrians for their pride (Isa. 10:15-19). In fact, Abimelech chastises Abraham (Gen. 20:9-11) and the pagan sailors were shocked that Jonah could flee his own God (Jonah 1:10). David committed adultery, tried to hide it with a murder, and then sought to deceive Israel, himself, and God until Nathan confronted him (2 Sam. 11-12). Calvin comments rightly: "If David had been a poor pagan, he



would still have been inexcusable."

C. S. Lewis pointed out that "there would be no sense in saying that a footballer had committed a foul unless there was some agreement about the rules of football". All world views – whether theistic or atheistic – use the language of right and wrong, even when they are trying to deny that there is a right or wrong.

What this means is that Christians should have more confidence that in opposing same-sex marriage, for example, we are actually resonating with unbelievers to some considerable degree. We should pursue this line, and not be concessive. This is not for our good so much as for the good of society. Just as drug addicts is not helped when they are given more ice, so homosexuals are not helped when they get their own way regarding their sexuality.

Christian social policy ought to consist of rather more than demanding that we have the freedom to say some things in our own little corner of the public space. On the issue of same-sex marriage, we are saying: "This is wrong, and even unbelievers know it deep down, and society ought not to pander to the homosexual lobby but oppose them – for the good of society and for the good of sinners too." 'Repent' is not just a message of law; it is part of the proclamation of grace.

Peter Barnes is editor of AP

“Christian social policy ought to consist of rather more than demanding that we have the freedom to say some things in our own little corner.”