



## The Wee Flea in Australia

By David Robertson

‘How are you getting on in Australia? Get yourself in trouble yet? What are the Aussie Presbyterians like?’ asked a friend from Scotland. “Fine....not yet but give me chance....don’t know but now I’m writing for them we will soon find out!” came the reply. I’ve not yet had a great deal of experience in Aussie Presbyterian churches – Scots in Sydney, Christ College in Sydney, Queensland theological college in Brisbane; York St Presbyterian in Brisbane; Chatswood Presbyterian men’s conference, Nowra, the Chinese Presbyterians and Rose Bay are the limit of my Presbyterian experience here – so far! So please forgive the musings of an ignorant foreigner.

It’s strange having an outsider’s perspective – there are advantages (not belonging to any particular tribe, not having the same depth of emotional and personal engagement) and disadvantages (not belonging to any particular tribe, not having the same depth of emotional and personal engagement). When Mark Powell asked me to write for this august publication I was delighted – not because I want to write a personal reflection, but rather because I have grown to care deeply about the communication of the Gospel in this wonderful land – and being a Presbyterian minister, I have a particular love for the Presbyterian church. After all I come from the home of Presbyterianism (other than of course the first General Assembly at Jerusalem) and am in the words of Paul, a Presbyterian of the Presbyterians – having ministered in the Scottish Highlands and then the church of Robert Murray McCheyne – St Peters in Dundee.

But like Paul, I hope I can say that I count all this rubbish compared with the glory of knowing and sharing Christ. Our concern with history is not so that we can glory in it, but so that we can use it to help us glorify Christ, now and in the future.

We uphold Presbyterian doctrine and ecclesiology because, at its best, it is the best and most effective way to spread the Gospel and build up the Church. At its worst it is a kind of purgatory (if we believed in that sort of thing!).

I hope to reflect in a regular way on some aspect of Australian life and especially how we can surf the waves of our culture in order to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ. I work on the conviction that the best way to evangelise is through the local Church. I also believe in the words of Will Metzger’s still relevant book on evangelism, *The Whole Truth*; that we are to tell “the whole gospel to the whole person by whole people”. We must not compartmentalise public worship, prayer, mercy ministry, preaching, discipleship and evangelism as though they were separate, disconnected entities.

I am known as the Wee Flea because Richard Dawkins called myself, John Lennox and Alistair McGrath, ‘fleas living of a dog’s back’, for writing against his book *The God Delusion*. He had banned me from his website so I figured that he would not be too aware of Scottish Presbyterian history and I decided to use the pseudonym *The Wee Flea*. (My denomination, the Free Church of Scotland, was colloquially known as ‘the Wee Frees’). Somehow the name stuck, and it is largely how I am known. In fact, I was sitting in a church meeting here in Australia a while ago and when the person beside me heard I was a Scot he informed me that he followed a Scot called ‘The Wee Flea’ online! I quickly prevented him hurting my feelings or boosting my ego!

Fleas are irritating and unpleasant. That’s not really what I want to be. I prefer the image of a pebble in a shoe. Something that makes you stop, think and take stock. A word of advice in

reading this column – please don't try to read between the lines or understand the code. I try not to speak in code. Also, most of my writing is thinking out loud – which means I often get things wrong. But surely the principle we work on is that of iron sharpening iron?

In a nutshell my belief/observation is that Australian is not nearly as far down the godless secularisation route that the UK in general, and Scotland in particular has gone. We, and I use the term 'we' because I regard myself as an honorary Australian, are on that route, but we don't have to continue that way. I also believe that the society here is simultaneously both more hostile and more open to the Gospel – but that the church in general, including the Presbyterian church – is struggling to communicate that Gospel, in a society which so desperately needs it. We need to understand the culture and understand the

Word even more – so that we can communicate that Word to the world. That's what we will look at over the coming weeks...

“Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard” (Malachi 3:16) . My hope and prayer are that I will learn a great deal from interacting with you. SDG.

*David Robertson is a Scottish Presbyterian minister who came to Australia in 2019 to direct Third Space – an evangelistic project designed to help churches in outreach and evangelism in today's culture. You can contact him at david.robertson@thirdspace.org.au*

*www.thewee flea.com*