

AUSTRALIAN

# Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

november 2006

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# AUSTRALIAN Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

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## editorial

The recent outbreak of war between Israel and Hezbollah brings into bold relief many of the underlying issues that continue to simmer in the Middle East. Sadly, the brutal clash between these two antagonists is unlikely to be resolved by diplomacy. At the heart of the dispute is Israel's occupation of the territory known formerly as Palestine. It is this occupation, sanctioned by the United Nations in 1948, which has led to the violence.

Hassan Nasrallah, secretary-general of Hezbollah, has made it clear that Israel's destruction is one of the main and non-negotiable goals of Hezbollah. He has stated that "Israel is an illegal usurper entity, which is based on falsehood, massacres, and illusions. There is no solution to the conflict in this region except with the disappearance of Israel. Hezbollah refuses any conciliation with Israel in principle."

However, the problem is not simply a contest over the true ownership of the land. There is also a strong underlying theme of anti-Semitism in Hezbollah's position. Nasrallah has also stated: "The Jews who survive this war of liberation can go back to Germany or wherever they came from. Indeed, if they all gather in Israel, it will save us the trouble of going after them worldwide."

Whatever the rights or wrongs of Israel's occupation of the land, one thing that the church and all civilised nations can never countenance is the toleration of the blatant anti-Semitism that led to the Holocaust and which presently fuels Islamic terrorist attacks on Israel and Jews around the world.

Nevertheless, Christians are also faced with a dilemma: how do we express our love and compassion to the Jewish people, a commitment to which we are bound by the Bible, when we realise that there is an abundance of grievances on both sides going back decades, and Israel itself has perpetrated many injustices? How do we recognise the state of Israel and at the same time grieve with Palestinian Christians who languish in refugee camps with Israeli approval?

While issues of injustice demand an answer, they should not blind us to the greater obligation that we have to preach reconciliation through Christ to Jews and Arabs alike. As the church, we are not judges or arbiters, but ambassadors of salvation (Luke 12:14).

Peter Hastie <sup>ap</sup>

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# Ungrounded

*Modern Israel lacks unequivocal biblical endorsement.*



**P**rofessor Allan Harman is a research professor in the Presbyterian Church of Australia, specialising in Old Testament studies. He has studied at Edinburgh University, the Free Church College in Edinburgh and Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. He holds two doctorates in theology.

Professor Harman has been a full-time professor at the Free Church College in Edinburgh, the Reformed Theological College, Geelong, and the Presbyterian Theological College of Victoria, of which he was principal for 20 years from 1982. He has also served as a visiting professor in a number of different seminaries in the United States and Korea.

In recent years Professor Harman has had a prolific writing ministry. He has published commentaries through Christian Focus Publications on the *Psalms* (soon to be expanded and updated), *Deuteronomy* and *Isaiah*. He has just completed a soon-to-be-released commentary on the book of Daniel, published by Evangelical Press. His first book, which was a revision of A. M. Renwick's



**Allan Harman  
talks to  
Peter Hastie**

*The Story of the Church*, still sells very well and has been published in a number of languages including Chinese, Korean, Spanish and Portuguese. He is also editor of the *Reformed Theological Review*.

Professor Harman continues an active professional life, although no longer in full-time teaching. He has served as Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church of Australia and as Victorian Moderator, and is still a senior chaplain to the Australian Defence Force.

He lives in Geelong with his wife, Mairi, who also holds a doctorate from Monash University in Australian church history. They have five children. Professor Harman has a keen interest in the Middle East and in God's ongoing purposes for the Jews.

**For the last 60 years violence has erupted in Israel and Palestine. What**

**lies at the heart of it? Why are the feelings so intense on either side?**

The state of Israel has been virtually doomed to live in constant war with the surrounding peoples because the Jews have settled in a land that is occupied by Arabs who contest and resent that settlement. The problem started more than a century ago when Jews, who were seeking safe haven from European anti-Semitism, came to Israel as a place of sanctuary in the hope that they could re-establish the ancient kingdom of Israel there.

The Jewish people had been separated from Palestine for centuries, but in the late 1880s the "Zionist" movement began among them. The aim of this movement was to recover what they believed was their national home. Some of the early Zionists in Europe had thought that the resurrection of the Hebrew language would have been sufficient to have unified the Jewish people, but this position was rejected by more hard-line Jews. Their main aim was to make Palestine the Jewish national home. However, at the beginning of the 20th century, their ranks were split into hard-liners and assimilationists when

Britain offered a part of Uganda as the Jewish homeland.

For some Jews any land would have sufficed as long as they could have had security and tenure, but others believed that only Palestine would serve the purpose of a Jewish homeland. Therefore, they continued to press for the secession of Palestine to the Jewish people. This finally took place on 14 May 1948, when the Jewish state of Israel was proclaimed in Tel Aviv. The problem essentially is that the creation of Israel meant that large numbers of Arabs were dispossessed and disenfranchised in the new nation. They felt then and still continue to feel like second-class citizens. During the 1980s and 90s, Jewish settlements began to spread and took over even more Arab territory. Naturally, this has led to strong feelings of hostility which have erupted in tremendous violence and bloodshed.

**Arabs claim that since Islam began Arabs and Jews have lived relatively peacefully together in Palestine, and say all the trouble started when the modern state of Israel came into being. Do you agree?**

It's not an entirely accurate assessment of the problem. The reality is that tensions never really surfaced during the period of Islamic dominance because the Jews were so few in comparison to the number of Arabs. Up until the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the capture of Jerusalem by the Allied Forces in 1917, the Jews in Palestine had been only small in number and unable to exercise any real political influence. For the most part, Jews came from the underprivileged classes. They were largely poverty-stricken, which explains why numbers of wealthy Jews were providing support for the poorer ones in Jerusalem and elsewhere.

The other centre in Palestine that remained strongly Jewish was Safed in the north. It was a rabbinical centre, which retained a strong Jewish community. So the disproportionate numbers between Arabs and Jews was very much tilted in favour of the Arab community. This explains why there were no major outbursts of violence or ongoing unrest. The Jews were simply too weak to sustain an aggressive campaign against the Arabs. It would have been pointless and brought them even more trouble.

**Do you think Christians should be taking their stand openly with one side or the other in this conflict? And what problems are there in doing so?**

To a large extent the problem revolves around the interpretation of biblical prophecy. The issue which faces us is this: Was the land given in absolute perpetuity to the Jewish people? Our attitude to Israel's occupation of the land and the way in which it exercises control over the area to a large extent depends upon how we answer that question.

**Even if the land had been granted to the Jews through biblical prophecy, would that justify the dispossession of Arab settlers there simply on the basis that the land was theirs by divine grant?**

No, I don't think it would. My own view is that the way in which the Jewish people initially returned to Palestine was the correct one.

The first modern settlers to Israel took up residency by buying land. I think this was a fair and peaceful way of occupying the land and was perfectly just. I do not accept that Israel has any right to dispossess

*Israel has no right to dispossess Palestinians of their land simply by force of arms or in breach of the rule of law.*

Palestinians of their land simply by force of arms or in breach of the rule of law. Of course, most Orthodox Jews are like many in the Christian community who think that God gave the land to the Jewish people in perpetuity. Therefore, they think it's theirs forever. I don't take that position myself because I believe that it's based on a mistaken view of biblical prophecy.

**Do you think that many Christians feel that they should support Israel in view of the terrors of the Holocaust?**

I am sure that many do. I have certainly felt sympathy for the Jews as a result of all that they have suffered in the past. Their sufferings have been enormous. I know that I felt this way when I first went to Israel. Naturally, I also feel a sense of sympathy for them because our Saviour, Jesus Christ, was Jewish. Further, we share the Old Testament with them and all of God's promises concerning salvation through the Messiah.

However, our sympathy for Israel should not blind us to their unwillingness at times to extend sympathy to others. I have personally witnessed the treatment

that they hand out to Arabs, including Arab Christians. For instance, on a bus many of them will not even sit next to an Arab or near anyone wearing Arab head-dress. They deliberately ignore Arabs in public. I remember going into a bank and standing there waiting to be served. The teller signalled for me to come across so he could serve me before he would serve Arabs who were already waiting. One of the most noticeable things that I observed in Israel was the overt hostility to Arabs by Jews.

Despite the fact that I am generally sympathetic to Jewish people because of the terrible sufferings that they have experienced, I do not believe that a true reading of biblical prophecy supports the idea that the land of Israel is theirs in perpetuity. I believe that they had the land and they lost it. And that was the fulfilment of God's purposes as well.

**Some would say that that's a fairly strong view given that six million Jews disappeared in genocide during the Second World War. How do you respond to that?**

I don't think you can make up for the Jewish Holocaust in Europe by taking away the land that belonged to the Arabs in Palestine. It may be a form of compensation for the Jews, but how was it just for Arabs who were lawfully occupying the land? It may well have been a convenient solution for other nations who were trying to redress the evils that had been committed against the Jewish people, but it lacked justice for those who were deprived of their homeland. What may have seemed like an expedient decision back then has come back to haunt the world for several generations. And now there seems to be no end in sight. I think it was an unsatisfactory solution. Again, I don't think you solve one monstrous injustice by committing another.

**Doesn't the church have a lot to answer for in the development of anti-Semitism over the centuries?**

It is sad but true that some unfortunate things about the Jews have been written by Christian leaders over the centuries. I think it is regrettable that Luther, for example, expressed himself in such anti-Semitic ways at certain times. However, if you look at the period after the Reformation, I think that the Jews found more sympathy among Protestants than anywhere else in Europe. For instance, on the day during the Second World War when the Jews in Amsterdam were forced

to wear the yellow star, nearly everyone on the street wore yellow stars. The Germans couldn't tell who was who. The Dutch thought that the persecution of the Jews was wrong so they came to their aid. When you think of the number of Jews that were saved in the Netherlands, you need to remember that it was largely the Christians who gave them food, shelter and protection and, in many cases, suffered for doing so.

So, yes, the Christian church has a lot to answer for in its treatment of the Jews at various stages of church history. But that needs to be balanced by the fact that in many places such as the Netherlands and Great Britain, Jews have been treated reasonably well and have played a valuable role in society. We shouldn't forget that a famous British Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, was a Jew. Being Jewish certainly didn't prevent him from holding high office. Traditionally, in Scotland the Jews in Edinburgh and Glasgow have been well-integrated into their local communities.

### Both Jews and Palestinian Arabs lay claim to the same piece of land. What does the Bible say about ownership of land in general?

When we speak of ownership we are always speaking in a qualified manner. No one owns anything in an absolute sense. As Christians we believe that the true owner of the land is God. The Psalmist reminds us that "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1). Again, Paul says that "God made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live" (Acts 17:26). I think God certainly gave the Jewish people the land for a time, but I am not convinced that the gift was inalienable. The gift of the land was part of the wider purposes of God. It wasn't simply to provide a homeland for the Jews in perpetuity. Israel's settlement in the land was inseparably linked to God's plan to prepare the world for the coming of the

Lord Jesus. The issue of the real estate was always subordinate to that ultimate purpose.

### How should we assess Jewish claims that the land of Israel actually belongs to them in perpetuity because centuries before Christ it was actually promised to them through the covenant God made with Abraham?

In the first mention of God's promise of a land to Abraham in Genesis 12, there is no reference to the extent of the land. It simply says that his descendants would possess the land. When we move further

*As far as Jesus and the apostles are concerned, there is no longer a circumscribed piece of land that confines God's people.*

forward to Genesis 17 we have a description of the land. If we compare this with later descriptions in the Old Testament, one of the things we notice is that not all the descriptions of the land agree precisely. If we take the description in

Joshua 1 for example, or the poetic description in Psalm 80, I think we have to conclude that the land was a concept rather than a precisely defined geographical area. The boundaries in general were from Lebanon in the north to the river of Egypt. This reference to a river in Egypt is probably not the Nile but refers to the area just south of the Gaza strip. Its east-west boundaries are from the Mediterranean in the west to the Euphrates in the north-east. Of course, some claim that the Jews never reached these boundaries, and therefore the fulfilment of the promise must of necessity lie in the future. But from the biblical records it does seem that the boundaries were reached in the time of Solomon (1 Kings 4:21, 24) and also later in the days of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25, 28). It is also significant that after the Exile the Levites praised God who had fulfilled His promise to Abraham by giving the land to His people (Neh. 9:7, 8).

However, the problem for many Christians and Jews is that God's promise to give the Israelites the land seems to be a promise that the land would be theirs for ever. For instance, the Lord says to Abraham: "The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your

descendants after you; and I will be their God" (Gen. 17:8). Does this mean that the land was given to Abraham and his descendants as a perpetual possession? The issue here revolves around the word "everlasting". The English expression certainly conveys the idea of possession in perpetuity, but the actual Hebrew word in question, *olam*, is not nearly so definite. The word *olam* is found many times in the Old Testament, and often with a temporal meaning. For example, a similar expression is used in reference to the slave who refuses to go free (Ex. 21:6; Deut. 15:17b), and clearly is used in the sense of "for the term of his natural life". Similarly, the Aaronic priesthood was to last "forever" (Ex. 40:15; Num. 25:13), but we know that it was replaced by the high priesthood of one after the order of Melchizedek. It is not necessary, therefore, to insist that the Jews should have ownership and occupation of the land of Canaan in perpetuity. Leupold, the commentator, is quite correct when he says: "All who fall back on this promise as guaranteeing a restoration of Palestine to the Jews before the end of time have laid into it a meaning which the words simply do not convey".

When we come to the New Testament there is no mention whatsoever of a contingent possession of the land by the Jewish people. The vision of the New Testament goes far beyond the land as it is. Canaan was simply an earthly sign. Indeed, the writer to the Hebrews points out that believers through the ages have always been looking beyond the earthly land of Canaan to a heavenly country (Heb. 11:16). This is consistent with what we find in Psalm 72 and Zechariah 9, where we discover that when the Messiah comes the boundaries of the land will extend outwards, not inwards into relatively narrow confines. Christ's rule shall be from the River, that is, the river Euphrates, outwards to the ends of the earth. And that's the vision of the New Testament. As far as Jesus and the apostles are concerned, the rule of God and the ministry of the gospel are universal. There is no longer a circumscribed piece of land that confines God's people.

The misunderstanding of Israel's possession of the land is confirmed by the way the Old Testament approaches the question in relationship to Israel's disobedience. It tells us that if Israel lived in disobedience to the law they would be dispossessed of the land. And in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 that is spelt out. It

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is also reinforced in 2 Kings when the explanation is given for the fall of the northern kingdom. So in 2 Kings 17:7ff we are given the reasons why God dispossessed the people. Of course, when they returned after the exile they only came back to a very narrow portion of the land that was available to them.

### **Do you think the land is still an important part of the Abrahamic covenant?**

While God certainly still has a place for the Jews in His purposes, I am not persuaded that the modern secular state of Israel is precisely what Paul has in mind. Personally, I don't think the land is an important thing for Christian theology now. If it was important, the New Testament would have spelt this out in some detail. Interestingly, in Romans 9-11, which is the longest section in the New Testament dealing exclusively with the status of the Jewish people, there is no mention whatsoever of the land. What concerns Paul is the Jewish people, not the land of Israel. Therefore, to argue that it is still a major focus of biblical revelation runs up against the obstacle that the New Testament does not view the land as an essential issue in regard to the identity of the Jewish people, or in regard to them as they relate to the gospel itself.

### **Many Christians support the right of modern Israel to occupy the land because they say Bible prophecies are meant to be interpreted literally. How do you respond?**

It is quite true that many Christians appeal to the prophets, and in particular Isaiah, in reference to the repossession of the land. However, the passages in Isaiah have explicit reference to the return of the Jews from exile, not an ultimate fulfilment of some later time. The Christian Embassy in Jerusalem often likes to quote Isaiah 40 in support of the idea that God is obligated to provide comfort for Israel, and that all the following passages in Isaiah somehow refer to modern-day Israel. The picture that we are given is of God leading His children out of exile in a new exodus so that they can return to the land. However, the prophet also speaks about a later day when there will be an even greater exodus when the Messiah will come. So, I don't believe that you can press the prophecies to speak of any other return apart from the return from exile that those passages refer to.

**What then is the status of the land**

### **under biblical prophecy?**

I think we need to remember that one of the covenant curses was to be dispossession of the land. When the Jews had broken the Mosaic covenant for centuries, God visited the curses of the covenant upon them by sending them into exile. Even though many returned to Israel after 70 years, they never really recovered the land. It was only a partial possession at best. Further, nowhere does the New Testament give us any indication that we're going to have a re-establishment of a national Israel in a way that is something similar to Old Testament Israel.



***If Israel could come to a settlement with the Palestinians that would also solve the Lebanese problem.***

### **What should be done for Palestinians?**

I think there has to be a separate Palestinian state. The unfortunate thing is that the Palestinian territory is divided by land that Israel possesses. This means that Gaza is separated from the West Bank. Israel has been trying to address this issue by suggesting that there be a highway linking the two without any exit points into Israel itself. So Israel recognises that there is a problem.

The difficulty, then, is that any Palestinian state has to be in two parts, and they have to have some interconnection between them other than by air or sea. My own view is that the Palestinians deserve their own autonomy and should be able to run themselves as a state. It may be that there can be some further reorganisation of the boundaries to accommodate better the claims of the Palestinians. The difficulty is that the Israelis are largely unprepared to concede territory and want to maintain present positions and keep control over some of the surrounding districts as they're doing still in parts of Gaza or the West Bank.

### **Have the Israelis been unnecessarily provocative in the way in which they occupied the land and treated the Palestinians?**

Yes, there is a definite strain in Israel's history that reflects that tendency. It was there even before the formation of the state of Israel. Great Britain had great difficulty dealing with some elements among the Jews during the period of the British mandate over Palestine after the end of the First World War. During the mandate there were serious tensions. On the one hand, the Jews of Europe, who faced growing persecution by the Nazi regime, wanted to move to Palestine but the Arabs clearly saw the ultimate outcome of such a move and resisted it. This placed Britain in an invidious position between the two. As the mandate authority British troops were faced with terrorist attacks from both Jews and Arabs. These attacks ceased as far as the Jews were concerned with the outbreak of the Second World War. They quickly realised that they had to fight on the side of the Allies against Nazi Germany. However, immediately the war was over, Jewish attacks started again with the Stern Gang and others. Of course, David ben Gurion himself was deeply implicated in some of the atrocities against British soldiers at the time.

### **Is there a sense in which the Israelis have been unduly provocative?**

Yes, without a doubt. Since the formation of modern-day Israel successive Israeli governments have, in my opinion, exercised excessive force against others – and not only against Muslims. For instance, they have dispossessed many Arab Christians as well. We have to remember that towns like Bethlehem and Nazareth are Christian Arab towns. Traditionally, Nazareth had 75,000 nominal Christians living there. However, Israel has treated those Christians like they treat the Arab Muslims. They have made little effort to distinguish between Christian and Muslim communities and therefore many Christian Palestinians have been forced to leave their territory as well.

### **Do you think there's any hope that if Israel shows good will and political flexibility the conflict could be resolved?**

Perhaps. It's hard to say. What I do know is that Israel has tended to react with excessive force, and that has had huge consequences that have not helped Israel. She has lost the support of many countries because of her treatment of the Palestinians. If Israel had been less aggressive, it is my view that it would have been better for her relationship with the sur-

rounding countries and some of the problems could have been solved diplomatically. Over the years we have seen Egypt and Jordan come into closer relationships with Israel than other Arab countries. So I think it's true that if Israel had acted in a more restrained fashion there would have been better outcomes for everyone.

I think that if Israel could come to a settlement with the Palestinians that would also solve the Lebanese problem. It would also open the possibility of a wider peace in the area.

**How did Jesus and the apostles understand the fulfilment of the hopes and longings of the people of Israel for the land?**

We know from the start of Luke's gospel that there were people who were looking for the coming of the kingdom and who were clearly conversant with the Old Testament promises about it. Interestingly, however, the coming of this kingdom is not expressed either in terms of land or an earthly kingdom. Clearly, some of the disciples at least had misunderstood the purpose of the Lord's coming so that even after His death and resurrection, they're still asking the question, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" They clearly did not grasp the significance of Jesus' message when He spoke about the kingdom being either within you, that is, within your heart, or among you, in the sense that the kingdom of God had come in the person of the Lord Jesus. When Jesus spoke of the kingdom He looks forward to a new international reality of God's rule which will include people from every tribe, tongue and nation under heaven. So I don't think that the New Testament has a territorial kingdom in mind; rather, Christ has a spiritual kingdom in view which includes all those who believe in Him.

**The Jews were nevertheless looking for the redemption of Israel in a political and national sense. What did Jesus understand by the redemption of Israel?**

Jesus understood the redemption of

Israel in spiritual rather than political terms. As opposition to Him grew throughout His ministry, Jesus began to hint that His work in establishing the kingdom would involve Him in great suffering. As the time draws nearer to His impending death, Jesus speaks about a ministry of Himself as the Son of Man who has come not to be served but to

*Some people would take the view that the church replaces Israel, but that is not the way the New Testament expresses it.*

serve and to give His life a ransom for many. So our Lord begins to focus upon the significance of His death and resurrection rather than the formation of some earthly kingdom. Christ knew that true deliverance would only come through the for-

giveness of sins and the transformation of human nature. Restoring land to Israel did not address the fundamental problem of man's alienation from God.

**Some Christians think that in the millennium Israel and the temple will be reconstituted. Is such a hope consistent with the way the New Testament views the temple?**

The New Testament speaks about the finality of Jesus' work on the cross. That does away with the temple and all that was associated with it. The fact that the veil of the temple was split into two from top to bottom indicates that the way into the holy place is forever open. Therefore, to suggest there should be a return at some time later in history to a restored temple or a restored sacrifice is a denial of the finality of Jesus' work. It is simply unthinkable. Of course, some people are attracted to the images of a restored temple that we find in the later passages of Ezekiel, but I personally believe that Ezekiel 40-48 is a picture of the ultimate kingdom. If you try to work out the measurements of that temple, you'll discover that they don't fit the geography of the

region and the holy place would be outside of Jerusalem. So I take it that Ezekiel 40-48 is a picture of the ultimate kingdom rather than of any restored temple to Jerusalem.

**Has the church actually superseded the Jewish people or taken their place in God's purposes? Does Israel have a present role?**

Some people would take the view that the church replaces Israel, but that is not the way the New Testament expresses it. It clearly shows that there is, and continues to be, an integration of Jew and Gentile within the one kingdom, although the Jewish people remain as a separate ethnic group. I think that Romans 11 is telling us that a day is coming when there will be a large ingathering of Jewish people into the kingdom of God. If the falling away of some Jews brought the gospel to the Gentiles, how much greater says Paul, will be the restoration of all the Jewish people? However, when Paul goes on to say that all Israel will be saved I don't think we should press that to mean that every single Jew will become a believer. I think we should interpret Paul's statement to mean that there will be a very large ingathering of Jewish people into the kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

**What then should be the proper attitude of Christians to Jews? What sort of spiritual obligations should Christians have towards Jewish people?**

I believe that our first obligation is to love them sincerely because we know that our Saviour was born as a Jew. There should be no trace of prejudice in the church against the Jews. Our Christian heritage depends so much upon the Jewish Bible (Old Testament) and as Christians we should be grateful for the way that faithful Jews across the centuries guarded the sacred text. Then we have to so live before them that they see something in us that attracts them to Christ. If we reach out to the Jews in love and compassion there is every likelihood that they themselves will be drawn to Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. ap



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# A Christian snapshot

*Israeli churches face unique challenges, yet have cause to hope.*

The Westminster Directory for Public Worship instructs the church to seek God's grace in prayer for itself, and then, first of all, "to pray for the propagation of the gospel and kingdom of Christ to all nations; and for the conversion of the Jews". Such an injunction is the product of Reformed theology, which affirms continuity with the Old Testament and with the Old Testament people of God in a way that no other Christian confession does. For this reason, I am delighted to write for *Australian Presbyterian* about the Israeli-Jewish Christian scene.

Integrated Jewish-Christian life in Israel all but ended some 1900 years ago with the final destruction of Jerusalem when the Emperor Hadrian made a determined attempt to stamp out all signs of Jewish national life in the land. Over the centuries, there have been scattered attempts to renew a Jewish-Christian presence there, but these have been ineffective.

Growing British influence in the land, followed by the British mandate after the First World War, led to an increased presence of evangelical British soldiers and civil servants. This in turn resulted in a numerically small but proportionately significant growth of Jewish Christians. However, the presence of Jewish Christians was stunted and then reduced with the departure of the British forces when the modern State of Israel was formed in May 1948. Many believers left the land when the British forces withdrew due to fears of a rising Jewish nationalism in what was then Palestine.

I was converted to Christ in Israel in 1963, when the number of Jewish Christians in Israel was estimated at 200 to 300 and there were no indigenous Hebrew-speaking churches. At the time there was no Christian literature in Hebrew and no visible Jewish Christian presence.

Today there are some 6000 to 7000 Jewish Christians in the land. If we included their children and spouses, not all of whom profess faith in Christ, the number would be closer to 10,000. There are more than 150 Hebrew-speaking con-



**Baruch Moaz**

gregations, five Hebrew language magazines for Christians, and a growing list of Christian books in Hebrew. A Bible college was established by the Pentecostal Church of Canada which seeks to serve the larger body of Christ, with increasing success.

Israel has a large Arab population (about 2 million out of a total population of 7 million). Some 300,000 of these are nominally Christian, primarily Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox. Israeli evangelical Arab Christians number some 1500. Most of these are Christian Brethren, although there are numbers of American Baptists, Nazarenes, and Pentecostals. The Anglican Church within the Arab community no longer affirms a clear evangelical confession. Those working among the Jews tend to be more clearly evangelical, although largely of a Charismatic bent.

Although relations between churches and believers in the two national contexts are cordial, they tend to be limited due to the continuing challenge posed by the conflict between their respective nations. There is personal goodwill on both sides. Some Arab and Jewish congregations meet from time to time for joint services and occasional shared evangelistic outreaches. The Christian Student Movement in Israel is also a common rallying point.

However, the stark conflict of national interests has meant that a broad cooperation between the two groups and the possibility of a tangible unity is difficult. The National Conference of Hebrew

Speaking Congregations, for example, has rejected repeated calls to become a Fellowship of Evangelical Churches, and there are social aid funds that will cater only for Jewish Christians.

Few of the Hebrew-speaking churches have Arabs among them, and none of the Arabic-speaking congregations have Jews. In part, this is due to differing geography, but it is also the product of a dispensational view of eschatology which accords Israel a prominence that discomforts most evangelical Arabs. The Messianic movement, with its emphasis on national Jewish identity as a basis for congregational life, has also rendered mixed congregations less likely. This is accentuated by the natural human tendency for minorities (both Arab and Jewish) to seek acceptance by their respective majorities through over-identification.

There are some exceptions, although they tend to prove the point. For instance, an Arab pastor serves a largely Jewish church in Haifa, but he does so at the expense of his own national identity and by placing what some consider to be an undue emphasis on the Jewish identity of the church he serves. A church in Rishon Le'Tsion includes an Arab family, but this family is largely assimilated into Israeli-Jewish culture and feels more comfortable in that context than among its own people.

Needless to say, there are Jewish and Arab Christians who have lost loved ones or experienced attacks, abuse or loss of property in the course of the conflict. While we are called to put Christ first in all matters, the reality of sin and the ten-

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dency to compromise has not served us well in terms of our duty to give Christ – rather than national interests and considerations – the central place He deserves in our personal and congregational lives. There is relatively little prayer in Hebrew-speaking churches for Christian Arabs, or for the Palestinians. There is still less practical effort on the part of congregations to set aside issues of the present conflict in order to relate to each other meaningfully as churches in Christ.

Cooperation between Hebrew-speaking churches is increasing but remains largely based on the personal relations of their respective leaders. This, too, is changing as various churches undertake to address needs and opportunities and to invite other churches to either join hands or accept the resources of another. Local church initiatives are often open to participation by congregants of other congregations. Twice to three times a year, a national fellowship is held for pastors, elders, deacons and “leaders” of Hebrew-speaking congregations.

Another welcome example is a pact signed by some of the churches of central Israel to support and oversee each other’s church discipline. This has led to the happy resolution of some intra-congregational difficulties as well as rendering church discipline more effective in restoring sinners and maintaining the purity of the churches. We both oversee and support each other’s church discipline, and

doing this has enabled us to prod each other toward a more biblical view of church life and practice, as well as preserving us from potentially painful mistakes.

I am not so well-informed about the Christian scene among the Palestinians who live in the Palestinian Authority. We have limited access to these brethren because of the conflict. Muslim rule – even before Hamas was voted into power

*Sadly, for a variety of reasons, Reformed witness among the Jews has receded into hesitant embarrassment.*



– has meant constant pressure on the Christian population, resulting in a steady emigration of Christians to other countries. However, evangelical life in many Palestinian cities remains courageously vibrant. There are few churches in the smaller towns and none in the villages.

Most of the congregations are Charismatic and strongly inclined to emphasise national and cultural identity. Dispensational premillennialism and an Arminian view of the faith are largely assumed. One church in the country

affirms a Reformed (and Baptist) confession of faith and two others affirm a mildly Calvinistic understanding of Christianity that has yet to be worked out in other spheres of truth and practice. All but one of the congregations describe themselves as Messianic rather than Christian. The (Norwegian) Lutherans have two congregations in the country, the Christian Brethren and the Christian and Missionary Alliance have one each. All other congregations are non-denominational.

Over the years, there has been a disconcerting and surprising neglect of Jewish evangelism in Israel by Reformed churches, with the sole exception of Christian Witness to Israel. This mission has laboured in Israel for some 90 years. I was privileged to lead this ministry until December 2005. One of the evangelical Dutch Reformed denominations has begun a welcome work in Israel. Grace and Truth Christian Congregation, a Reformed Baptist church in Rishon LeTzion, has been in the forefront of evangelism since its founding in 1976.

For the most part, evangelical Arabs assume a premillennial view of the future and therefore pray for the conversion of the Jewish people. They are, however, challenged by the present conflict. Both constituencies give slight space to teaching about the unity of the Body of Christ, a much needed truth in the light of the challenges facing us.

Little thought is given to working out the doctrinal relations between the two paradoxical biblical truths of the gospel, being “to the Jews first” (Acts 3:25-26; Rom. 1:16) and fact that in the church there is “neither Jew nor Gentile” (Rom. 2:9-10; 3:29; 9:24; 1 Cor. 12:13, Gal. 3:28). We are in need of more biblically informed and morally sensitive theologising that has been a characteristic of the best Reformed theology over the centuries. Our churches are overly committed to their respective national political platforms rather to the gospel of Christ.

Among Jewish Christians, an emphasis on national identity has sometimes boiled over on to an adoption of rabbinical practices. Sadly, this is regarded not simply as a cultural adaptation but is seen as somehow a duty to God. Some Jewish Christians have also been embarrassed by the doctrine of the Trinity and, in a growing number of cases, this has led to a covert or even overt denial of the deity of the Messiah. Some hold a view of Jesus which is often couched in semi-Arian

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terms disconcertingly familiar to those who are acquainted with the history of heresy in the church.

Israeli society is grossly materialistic, hedonistic and increasingly distanced from biblical morality. Only 17 per cent of the population affirms any kind of religious faith. Christians, therefore, tend to develop their own social contexts within the framework of their respective churches. As a result, churches among Jewish Christians in Israel tend to serve as social centres in addition to providing a context for worship and spiritual growth.

Few of the churches have a constitution, few manage an annual church budget and only a handful have given consistent study and thought to their church structure and function. Most issues are determined on an *ad hoc* basis as the need arises.

An average church among the Jews in Israel numbers some 150 to 200 congregants (children included), with anything between 25 to 60 per cent of them being former Russian-speakers. In addition, there are some 50 Russian and nine Amharic-speaking congregations. The latter tend to be somewhat smaller.

Local Christians tend to live on the periphery of their societies. Few, especially among the Jews, are self-employed and many are on the lower rung of the economic ladder. This means that churches tend to be dependent on material support from overseas. As a result, and through a lack of confessional and constitutional restraints as well as the absence of annual budgets, "leaders" (the preferred term) of congregations tend to have more clout in their congregations. They are often somewhat more autocratic than might be esteemed best for those churches. This situation also provides an opportunity for well financed overseas bodies to influence the churches, even though their theology leaves something to be desired.

Evangelism is legal in Israel and local Christians are often engaged in open evangelism on the streets during public events and on other special occasions. However, radio and television stations refuse free access for Christians and most of the newspapers are reticent to accept evangelical advertisements. An illustrated translation of the Old Testament into Modern Hebrew has failed to gain access to the bookshops for fear of religious retaliation. Bookshops do not wish to be seen to support "missionising".

Jewish-Christian relations have had such an unhappy history that it is with


surprise and appreciation that we must view the measure of liberty accorded Jewish Christians and other evangelicals in Israel. While evangelism is legal in Israel, it is far from popular and is strenuously resisted by the religious Orthodox community. The measure of national and local government tolerance towards the church and its mission varies as each new government is formed.

**R**eformed Christians used to be at the forefront of Jewish evangelism. Sadly, for a variety of reasons, Reformed witness among the Jews has receded into hesitant embarrassment, and in some cases has even been replaced by firm opposition. Political positions taken as to the rights and wrongs in the Middle East conflict have sometimes mistakenly translated themselves into an unwillingness to support gospel work among either Jews or Arabs. I sometimes wonder why this should be so. After all, if we think one side is more the sinner than the other, that side should be the object of our all-the-more-determined gospel efforts. Surely, the greater the sin, the greater the condemnation; and the greater the danger, the more obvious is the need of the gospel.


Others, enthralled with a less-than-biblical "Christian Zionism", have estranged the Arab-Israeli and Palestinian populations from the gospel because they have wedded their message to a political platform.

Reformed Christians have the theological tradition to respond to both extremes with a truly biblical message. They have a theological heritage that enables them to address the Jewish people with the gospel as no other understanding of the Christian faith can do. The gospel scene in Israel and among the Jews worldwide demonstrates the need for such a clear, courageous, consistent and committed gospel witness. It is time to resume this approach and call the people of Israel back to God and to the Messiah appointed for them.

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# To the Jew first

*The church too easily forgets a primary responsibility.*

**T**he Jewish people are not a museum piece to be dusted off, inspected and returned to their shelf; they are very much alive today. The conflict in the Middle East has ensured we do not forget this, a reminder which, rightly or wrongly, is usually accompanied by negative impressions. These can be countered by remembering the significant contribution of the Jewish community to all sectors of Australian society, such as the benevolence of the Jewish founders of the retailing giants Myer and Westfield.

But in the Christian world they can easily become a museum piece because they are viewed as part and parcel of the gospel's history. Open a book on Christian doctrine and see whether what I might term the metamorphosis of the people of God from Jewish nation to Christian Church has left the Jewish people without a chapter or section. Or read another book about the unfolding of God's revelation over the ages and see whether they manage to re-emerge from the shadows.

Pay a visit to your local Christian bookstore, look in the section on mission



**Paul  
Morris**

***It is a strange  
state of affairs  
when a  
covenant  
people are  
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people who  
stress God's  
covenants.***

or on world religions, and see if you can find a publication concerning the Jews among the large number covering other religions, especially Islam. You will find one or maybe two. Does such museum-piece status or insignificance seem

strange to you? It should do when you consider that the gospel originated with the Jews and that they alone have had believers among them during all of the gospel's history. They have the pedigree of a princess but look more like a Cinderella.

Do I protest too much? Are there not

many Christians whose support for the Jews, and particularly the State of Israel, is highly vociferous? Indeed there are, but not many of them are found in the Reformed camp; they are mostly in the Dispensational one. And does this cause Reformed people to keep their distance? It certainly does. It is a strange state of affairs when a covenant people are neglected by a people who stress God's covenants.

It was not always so. Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813-1843; minister of St Peter's Church, Dundee) wrote: "I feel convinced that if we pray that the world may be converted God's way we will seek the good of the Jews and the more we do so the happier we will be in our own souls." To be particular about the Presbyterian Church of Australia, is it not time for us to get back to an earlier emphasis when there was a specific focus on mission to the Jews? An example of this would be with the section for mission to the Jews in the Church Hymnary, a section which has gained museum-piece status since the publication of *Rejoice!* This former emphasis was not based on sentiment but Scripture.

**A**useful way to think of the major covenants and their relationship is to consider the original covenant with Abraham as the primary promise covenant and the Mosaic and New covenants as those which God designed to administer His promises, first under Jewish national conditions and then under international ones. The obvious point is that all of these covenants were initially made with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

This simple fact of history explains why Paul gives Israel primacy in both salvation and judgement by his phrase "to the Jew first" in Romans 1:16 and 2:9. They alone had received the verbal and written promises of the gospel, and they alone had been prescribed a national culture and way of life which the gospel uniquely fulfilled. For the Jews, the gospel fitted like a glove – a description which refers to all that had been revealed to them, not to whether they personally received it. But many did personally



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receive it – or there would be no written New Testament – and they took the gospel out to the Gentiles, and so began the community of the New Covenant with believing Jews and Gentiles having a new and equal status in Christ’s “one new man”.

All of this is presented by Paul through his olive tree metaphor in Romans 11:16-24. The tree is the people of God, starting with national Israel, for the Jews are its natural branches. However, with the coming of Christ a metamorphosis takes place and God’s people are now made up of believing Jews and Gentiles, although it is essentially the same tree. In the context, Paul’s point to Gentiles is that they should beware of writing off the Jews; the tree is theirs and Gentiles are Johnny-come-latelys. That is so to this day. It may seem remote history to us but it is not to the One who has all its players living before Him. As Donald Robinson wrote: “For sure, the body of Christ transcends Israel, for it is a new humanity representing all nations. But Israel retains its primacy: in judgment, but also in believing and being saved (Rom. 1:16; 2:9,10); and it is the means whereby salvation is transmitted to all nations.”

The consequences for the church’s mission to the world are considered below, but first some obvious and significant consequences with respect to our mission to the Jewish people. First, the gospel of Jesus is most certainly for the Jewish people and it is the only way they can be saved from their sins. The saving events of the gospel took place in a Jewish context to meet their spiritual need first of all. If it is not for them then it is a counterfeit and is for no one else either. Their primacy in judgement, if they remain in unbelief, imparts an added sense of urgency to our taking the gospel to them.

**A** second consequence is that the gospel is still offered to them as a promise fulfilled, because the Jews are still God’s people (Rom. 11:1) and they remain especially beloved of God (Rom. 11:28); a covenant relationship still exists between the LORD and Israel. They have not become pagans, even if some choose to live as such, but are still the natural branches. Their national culture, despite all the errors of the rabbis, is still a shadow of the gospel, although without the Shekinah it has become like a beautiful shell with nothing living inside it. In addition to that, the Scriptures of the Old Testament are still recognised as the testimony to them of who God is and who

they are. All other nations are wild olive trees by comparison. This means the gospel calls Jewish people to come back to all that God has already revealed to them.

A third consequence is that there will always be some Jewish people saved – mission to Jews will be fruitful! This is due to God’s covenant faithfulness to His promises made to Israel, as Paul reasoned about his own salvation in Romans 11:1. Every Jewish person who comes to faith is an evidence of that faithfulness, or, to be hypothetical, the absence of any Jews



***If the gospel is not for the Jews, then it is a counterfeit and is for no one else either.***

believing would impugn God’s faithfulness to His promises and give the impression of the gospel as an unwanted Jewish hand-me-down.

A fourth consequence is that the great hope of the New Testament for the Jewish people is a return to God, not a return to the land or the kingdom. Paul did not conclude his olive tree metaphor with a tree which split in two, nor did his one new man finally become two new men, that is, subsequent to Messiah’s coming there is to be no return to different covenant conditions for Jews and Gentiles. Hence mission to Israel is to focus its energies on the salvation and spiritual growth of Jewish people and not on activities which focus on their political aspirations and national eschatological hopes. That is not to say that Jewish concerns to live in safety somewhere in their ancient homeland should be insignificant to Christians, or that Christians should have no interest in what Scripture says regarding promises of future gospel blessings for them; however, such are not the primary focus of our energies in mission to Israel.

A fifth consequence is that we should aim and expect to see Jewish people in the churches. Churches are meant to be local expressions of the “one new man from the two” (Eph. 2:15), the two being Jews and Gentiles, a body where differences should be valued but also kept in place by the greater things which unite us.

A sixth consequence is that we should expect to see some from among us specifically called to engage in mission to the Jews. The apostles began a fundamental division in mission between those going to the Jews and those to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7-9) and there is no evidence that this distinction has been abrogated. An interesting source of support for this assertion might be Calvin’s quip that if the Pope was the heir of Peter he ought to be a missionary to the Jews!

**A** seventh consequence is that those who engage in this mission to Israel must expect to do the hard yards because the majority of Israel has been hardened in unbelief (Rom. 11:8-10). Mission to the Jews is not like taking the gospel to those in total ignorance and sunk in sin’s consequences. Such people frequently see the good news as just that – good news. With Israel much rejection must be experienced in order to find those who will listen because Christianity is perceived as bad news for Jews.

Finally, mission to the Jews should call forth unique feelings of gratitude, compassion and pity in Christians, because our desire is that they should come back into the blessing we have received through them, but which they have forfeited

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through unbelief. We want to provoke them to jealousy (Rom. 11:11-14).

I want to ask a simple question: what effect are such consequences having on our thinking regarding the Jewish people, our prayers for them and our outreach to them?

The consequences considered above emerge from a focus upon the Jewish people and our mission to them. That is necessary. But Scripture has also something to say on the relationship between the mission to the Jews and the mission to the Gentile world. When Jesus commanded His apostles concerning their future mission He was emphatic they must start at Jerusalem and from there move progressively to the whole world. The burden of Gentile mission was laid especially on the shoulders of one man, Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13). Hence his mission is especially a pattern to the Church as we continue to obey Christ's command to go to the ends of the earth. What stands out as strange about the ministry of the Apostle to the Gentiles is that he never ceased going to the Jews. We need to explore this a little and ask what relevance it has for the Presbyterian Church's mission strategy today.

There are probably not many Christians who would include the words "for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Rom. 1:16,17) in a two-sentence sum-

mary of the gospel – in fact many would find it sitting uneasily with their notions of equality – but Paul was clearly in no difficulty. What he meant by it has to some extent been discussed above – the gospel was promised to them and it has a primary relevance to them as a covenant people, but Paul's *modus operandi* shows that it also had practical implications. As Paul's mission to the Gentiles unfolded we can observe his practice of preaching first to Jewish people (Acts 13:5,14; 14:1; 17:1,10,17; 18:4,19; 28:16,17), which was not only his custom (Acts 17:1,2) but, as described in his own words, was a necessity (Acts 13:46).

There is no doubt that there was something unique about Paul's situation as he made that first announcement to Israel of the fulfilment of God's promise, and we can observe that he did not stick rigidly to this pattern when he revisited evangelised areas. But we cannot conclude from this that "to the Jew first" has no relevance for our practice today. The final event recorded in the Acts of the Apostles teaches otherwise. There we observe the closing scene of the ministry of the Apostle to the Gentiles. Paul has arrived in Rome, a city where the Jews were not ignorant of the gospel, but he continues with his pattern of a specific effort to reach them as well as all comers.

This pattern is surely one for us to follow as we take the gospel to the ends of the earth. As Murdo A. MacLeod wrote: "Without clear authority from God we have no right to revise the apostle's inspired prescription for the evangelisation of the world."

The lesson is clear. As we engage in a whole variety of endeavours to reach the Gentiles, we must always be making a specific effort to reach the house of Israel. Hudson Taylor, busy enough with a great work among the teeming multitudes of inland China, saw this, and always found time to send his first mission support gift of the year to the Hebrew Christian Testimony to Israel (HCTI) in an envelope marked "to the Jew first". He always received one in return from David Baron, the director of the HCTI, marked "and also to the Greek". There are many Christians who recognise this principle and make a point of supporting mission to the Jews along with their support for mission to others.

For church bodies like the Presbyterian Church of Australia, which believes in acting as a body on such significant issues, there is clearly a need to consider adopting such a mission strategy again.

Paul Morris is Australian director of *Christian Witness to Israel* 

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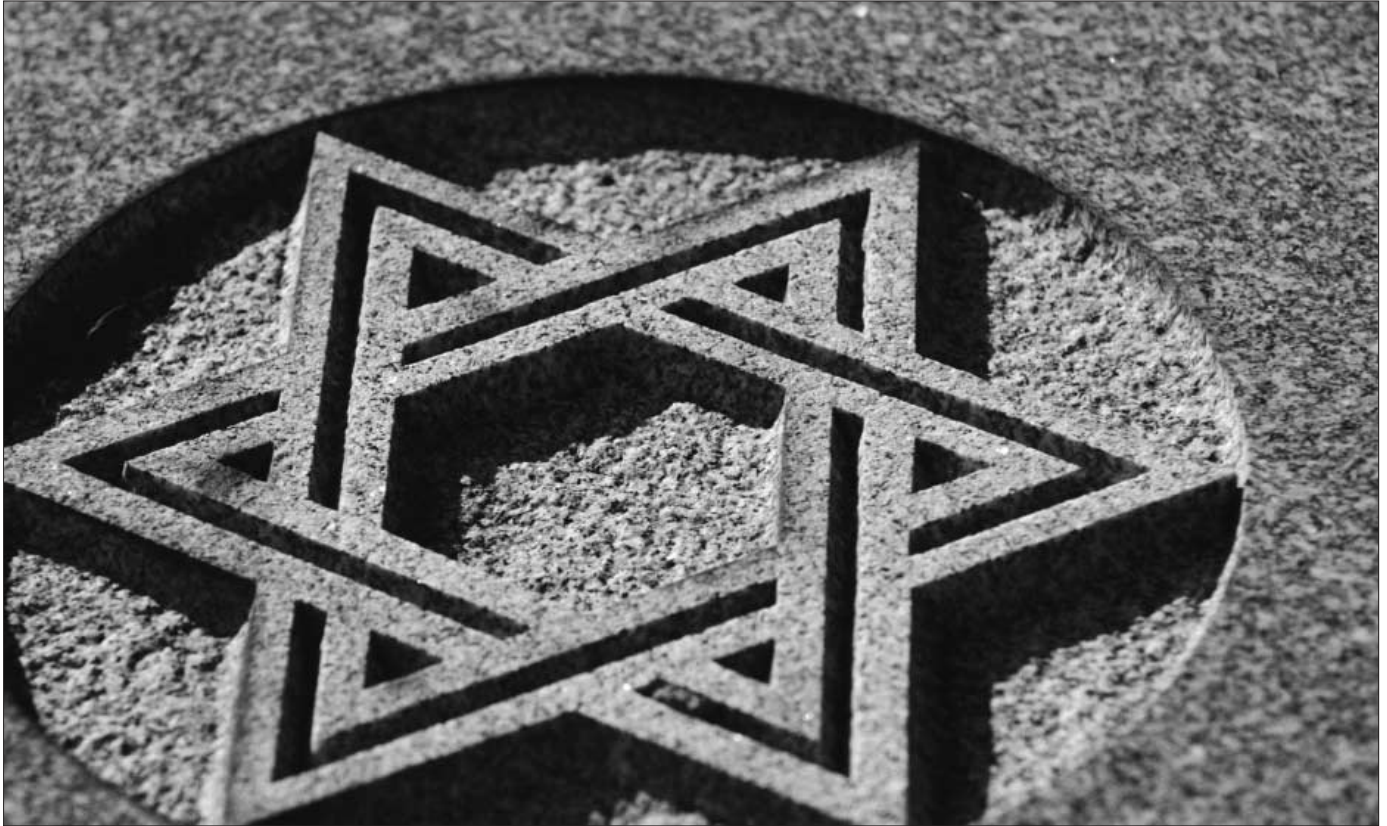
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# God's plan

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in Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36-37,  
Romans 9-11**

**I**t seems that Paul wrote Romans 9-11 to throw light on the question of where Israel stands as a people now that their Messiah has come and the message of salvation through faith in Him alone has embraced the Gentiles as well – and equally (Romans 1:5, 3:30, 4:9-12). The trouble is that, ever since, these three chapters have been variously interpreted, and the church has been quite divided as to the present status of the Jews and God's specific plan for them (if any) for the future. This month we will work through these chapters – and allow for the possibility that we won't all come out the other end having the same mind on all points! But first, we will look at three key Old Testament chapters in Jeremiah and Ezekiel to get some background into Jewish thinking.

Whatever conclusion we come to (and it might be good to have at hand a couple of commentaries that express different viewpoints) it is clear that it would be remiss of us to neglect our responsibility for Jewish evangelism. The overwhelming joy expressed by Jewish people who have come to faith in Jesus, and who, with Paul, have recognised Him as their promised Messiah (Christ), ought to be motivation enough for us at very least to pray that more of them will make this important discovery.

**Bruce Christian** ▶

**DAY 1**

*Loved with everlasting love*

**THE PASSAGE**

**JEREMIAH 31:1-14**

**THE POINT** Jeremiah has been predicting God's judgement of the Babylonian Exile on His covenant people, Judah, because of their gross apostasy. Chapter 29 is a letter to the exiles encouraging them to accept the 70 years in Babylon as God's loving discipline and to make the most of it. In Chapter 30 he helps them to do this by putting their suffering in the context of future restoration. Now in Chapter 31 he looks forward to a whole new covenant God will make with His chosen race – a covenant rooted in His love and mercy and internalised in the individual by a gracious work of His Spirit, not one focussed on human effort and obedience.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- The northern kingdom, Israel, will be included in the total

restoration of God's people. It will be like God's gracious provision in the wilderness after the escape from Egypt's sword (1-2).

- It is the LORD's covenant love that will draw them all together and establish them as a united, joyful people in the whole land; (northern) Israel will be found back in (southern) Zion (3-6).
- It is the LORD's firm declaration that all this must happen – and include all His dispersed (diaspora) people everywhere (7-14).

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

- What would this passage mean to Jewish people living today?

**DAY 2**

*There is hope for your future*

**THE PASSAGE**

**JEREMIAH 31:15-26**

**THE POINT** Rachel, wife of Jacob (Israel), is crying out from her tomb in Ramah (just NE of Jerusalem) for all her offspring: the nation that has split into 2 kingdoms (950 BC) – the northern one of which has already been conquered and scattered (722 BC), and the southern one of which (Judah) faces inevitable deportation – will soon be completely annihilated. But God sends Jeremiah with a strong message of hope for all Rachel's descendants.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Although sent only to Judah (since Israel/"Ephraim" had ceased to exist for over a century), Jeremiah's prophecy predicted the future restoration and blessing of the whole

covenant people, all the children of Israel resettled in their own promised land.

- The restoration would follow God's firm, but loving, discipline for their sin (cf Prov. 3:11-12), and their acknowledgement of the justice of this, leading to contrition and repentance (18-20).
- The restoration would represent a radical shift, involving God coming humbly among His people in perceived weakness (22b).
- The restored nation would be quite idyllic in its enjoyment of spiritual blessing and unspoilt fellowship with God (23-26).

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

- How is Jeremiah pointing us to the Incarnation (cf Matt. 2:18)?

**DAY 3**

*The days are coming...*

**THE PASSAGE**

**JEREMIAH 31:27-40**

**THE POINT** The promises of these verses are pointing forward ultimately to Christ and His Church, as is made clear in Hebrews 8 and 10.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- The sovereign LORD is the overseer/director of all the affairs in history of His chosen people, Israel – the times of judgement and disaster, as well as the times of restoration and blessing (27-28). His commitment to them and their future is as firm and reliable as His control over every function of the physical universe (35-37).
- The personalised, internal working of the Holy Spirit will also make guilt a matter of individual responsibility; there will

be no playing the blame game as is so prevalent today (29-30).

- The genius of the new covenant will be that it is all God's work from start to finish, resting on His grace alone. It will still be with His special chosen Israel, but every single one of them will now be the passive recipient of His mercy and forgiveness (31-34).
- Under the old covenant Israel had been an unfaithful wife (32).
- The places referred to in 38-40 are not all identifiable, and the subsequent 2,600 years of history suggest a spiritual application to the Church of God's Elect rather than a geographical one.

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

- How does Romans 3:25-26 link forgiveness in vs 34b to Christ?

**DAY 4**

*...they will soon come home*

**THE PASSAGE**

**EZEKIEL 36:1-15**

**THE POINT** Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel was commissioned by God, not only to pronounce judgement on the nations, including Israel, but also to speak of a future restoration of God's people. It is mainly (though not exclusively – cf 11:14-25) in chapters 36 and 37 that the prophet deals with this theme. He begins by addressing the land itself, its mountains and hills and pastures, declaring to them, "you will never again deprive [Israel] of their children" (12).

**THE PARTICULARS**

- The land (as we understand from our own indigenous people) is very important in an agrarian economy. The land was a vital part of the LORD's promise to His people (cf Genesis

13:14-17).

- The LORD always intended to bring final judgement on nations He used to discipline His people; they would not escape (1-7).
- The resettling of God's people in the Promised Land was a final "coming home" (8, 12); it is therefore a foreshadowing of heaven.
- The sovereign God of Creation determines the prosperity or otherwise of the land: as Australia faces an unprecedented period of drought we would do well to remember this and cry out to Him for mercy and turn to Him in repentance and faith.

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

- Is it inconsistent to long for heaven while praying for rain?

**DAY 5**

*“...for the sake of My holy name”*

**THE PASSAGE**

**EZEKIEL 36:16-23**

**THE POINT** Perhaps one of the greatest lessons the Church needs to learn today is that it exists, not for its own sake, for its own benefit, and for its own glory – but for the Lord’s. When we feel judged by the world on the basis of our apparent successes or failures, it is usually our own pride that is at stake, not God’s holiness. We need to learn to pray earnestly “Hallowed be Thy name” and be prepared to accept whatever is necessary for this to happen no matter how costly it might be in terms of our popularity, or even just respectability/acceptability, in the eyes of the world.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- It is a sad commentary on the sinful condition of man’s heart

that God had to exile His special, chosen people to Babylon because of the way they profaned His holy name in the land He had given them for blessing, and then had to bring them back home again because of their bad witness among their captors!

- Because of His holiness, God must judge and discipline His Church; but in doing so it gives the world the opportunity to ridicule its faith. This ought to stir us to more godly living – for His sake.

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

- God tells His Church (i) to live as strangers (exiles) in the world and (ii) to do it so as to bring glory to His name (see 1 Peter 1:1, 2:11-12). To what extent are we doing both these things today?

**DAY 6**

*You must be born again*

**THE PASSAGE**

**EZEKIEL 36:24-38**

**THE POINT** Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel uses language that indicates so radical a change in the way the LORD will deal with His people that it will be like a new covenant. Man really needs a fresh start – to be born again. The readings today and tomorrow make this clear.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Ultimately, for sinful man to have fellowship with a holy God he has to be cleaned up by God Himself; all else is only bandaid treatment. God needs to shower him with His clean water (25).
- More than that, he needs a whole new heart/mind – a complete transplant at the very centre of his being (26; cf Jeremiah 17:9).

- Further still, he will then need God’s (Holy) Spirit inside him to enable him to live in the way God designed him to live (27).

- All this will produce in God’s people true contrition and repentance, resulting in the outpouring of His blessing on them (28-32).

- The resettling of Jerusalem reads like a return to the Garden of Eden where God and man lived together in perfect harmony; it is therefore intended to be a foreshadowing of heaven (33-38).

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

- Consider the NT teaching about baptism, new birth, the work of the Holy Spirit. In the light of Ezekiel’s prophecy, what is the relationship between the Church and God’s promises to Israel?

**DAY 7**

*Can these bones live?*

**THE PASSAGE**

**EZEKIEL 37:1-14**

**THE POINT** Israel could no doubt identify with Ezekiel’s vivid picture of her true spiritual state. While they were enjoying the pleasures of sin no one could have convinced them of it, but now with time to reflect in exile it could hardly have escaped their notice that spiritually they were nothing but dry bones – dry bones entirely dependent on their sovereign covenant LORD to bring to life. What a blessing it would have been to hear His prophetic word!

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Unlike arrogant modern man, Ezekiel accepted the reality that the only spiritual truth he could know was what God chose to reveal to him; otherwise he was no more than dead bones (1-3).

- Life has its source in the creative voice of God. Even Israel had to learn that fallen man is, by nature, spiritually dead (cf Ephesians 2:1-10), and it is God alone who can speak and bring him to life (cf 2 Corinthians 4:6). This is the truth Jesus was demonstrating when calling out to dead Lazarus (John 11:43). “He speaks, and listening to His voice, new life the dead receive” (Chas. Wesley).

- The life-giving voice is directed at both man (7-8) and the Spirit (9-10); but the whole act of regeneration is the LORD’s work.

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

- How does the NT “own” the complete fulfilment of this prophecy?

**DAY 8**

*Israel to be whole and holy*

**THE PASSAGE**

**EZEKIEL 37:15-28**

**THE POINT** For the exiles of Judah to return to Jerusalem is one thing; but to be reunited there with their northern brothers who had already been dispersed among the nations for nearly 150 years, is quite another! As we try to know what God’s future plan is for His chosen people, we need to keep this in mind. It’s not just for the Jews, who have made an effort to maintain their ethnic purity, but for the 10 tribes who have been mixing freely with the other nations for over 2,700 years! This – coupled with the promised miracle of regeneration we looked at yesterday ... and John the Baptist’s statement in Luke 3:8 ... and Paul’s line of argument in Romans 4:9-17 and Galatians 3:6-14 – makes it difficult to avoid the conclusion

that Ezekiel’s prophecy is to be fulfilled in the Church as the “new Israel” consisting of Jew and Gentile alike.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- By the time of Jesus, the only identifiable remnant of Israel was the Samaritans, whom the Jews despised. Ezekiel’s prophecy about the joining of the sticks would have been, and still be, a very bitter pill to swallow; but the prophet is talking miracles!

- Ezekiel is emphasising a Messianic reign of peace that lasts for ever. From our perspective, it can only be the eternal covenant sealed with Christ’s blood (Hebrews 13:20), a covenant that extends to include people of every tribe and nation and tongue.

**DAY 9**

*Six hundred years later...*

**THE PASSAGE**

**ROMANS 9:1-5**

**THE PARTICULARS**

**THE POINT** Paul, the true-blue Jew (cf Philippians 3:4-6), had a very deep, heartfelt longing for the salvation of his fellow Jews. What had happened to him on the Damascus Road some 25 years earlier had made such a difference to him – his outlook, and his understanding of God and His saving work – that he wanted nothing more than that his “brothers”, who still had “a veil over their hearts” whenever they read their Scriptures (cf 2 Corinthians 3:12-16), should have the light turned on for them as well. And what about all those “eternal” covenant promises God had made to Abraham and his offspring? Is God unfaithful? Paul grapples with these questions, and his own emotions, in Romans 9-11.

- Paul’s deep feeling for the Jews is not contrived or superficial; the Holy Spirit gives him a clear conscience in this regard (1).
- If it were possible to swap places with still unbelieving Jews (many Pharisee colleagues?), Paul would willingly do so (2-3).
- Paul lists 8 unique privileges that God has given the people of Israel (4-5). Consider each in turn: what it would have meant to them; and what it might still mean to Jewish people today.

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

- What burden do you have for unsaved loved ones? ... the Jews?

**DAY 10**

*Selective grace*

**THE PASSAGE**

**ROMANS 9:6-9**

**THE POINT** Paul begins his defence of God’s selective purposes within His broad promises by tracing the actual history of His dealing with Abraham’s descendants. Abraham had 2 sons: Ishmael, his first-born, but not to his wife Sarah who was inseparably linked with the covenant promises; and Isaac, 15 years younger but the focal point of the covenant. (Paul’s point in these verses became even more relevant 500 years later when Mohammed rewrote history, replacing Isaac with Ishmael in the Genesis accounts!)

him (6).

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Being a descendant of Abraham is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for claiming a stake in the promises given

- God made clear in the unfolding of His covenant with Abraham that the promises given to him would be fulfilled exclusively through Isaac (Genesis 21:12, cf also Galatians 4:21-31) (7-9).
- Paul is preparing his readers to consider a very important principle God applies in the outworking of His sovereign grace: His promises are not “scatter-gun” promises made randomly to any who might want to take hold of them, but are directed specifically at those whom He chooses, “the children of the promise” (8).

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

- How important is inspired OT history to the Gospel of grace?

**DAY 11**

*Very selective grace*

**THE PASSAGE**

**ROMANS 9:10-18**

**THE POINT** It could be argued from the foregoing that the choice of Isaac over Ishmael was no big deal because Hagar was an Egyptian slave-woman, and Sarah’s servant. So Paul takes his argument a step further. God’s next choice, to bless one and reject the other, was between twins, brothers conceived in the womb together! Moreover, God’s choice was made before they were born and had a chance to prove themselves worthy of it! So the only basis for selecting Jacob over Esau was God’s exercising His sovereign will. His promises are targeted to individuals.

in Scripture that God’s electing grace is unconditional. Jacob, or you or I, contribute nothing, not even our faith, to earn a place in heaven; our names were already written in the Lamb’s book of life from the foundation of the world (Rev. 17:8, cf 13:8).

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Verses 11-13 are perhaps the strongest and clearest statement

- God’s own declarations about His right to run His world in the way He sees fit, without seeking man’s approval (Exodus 33:19, 9:16) must leave us silent before Him; He is holy, He is God.

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

- Are you tempted to think God is impressed by your decision to follow Jesus? Sovereign grace is a very humbling reality!

**DAY 12**

*Man a rotter, not a Potter*

**THE PASSAGE**

**ROMANS 9:19-29**

**THE POINT** Paul began this chapter by listing the advantages of belonging to Israel, God’s covenant people. But the God who chose Israel has every right to be selective within that choice, and beyond it!

God is so patient in delaying the execution of His inevitable sentence of death we all justly deserve. We are all culpable because we are sinners, and God is not bound by His character to save any of us. When, in His great mercy, He does save some of us, it only goes to prove the glorious wonder of His power and grace (22-24).

**THE PARTICULARS**

- The most basic expression of sin has always been man’s desire to change places with God – to be the potter and shape “god” the way he feels comfortable with! But, regardless of what we may say or think, this is not the reality; God is always God (19-21).
- Sinful man – all men – is justly condemned under the wrath of a holy God. This is reality. The truly amazing thing is that

- When it comes to God’s sovereign, electing grace, there are two facts that He had already made clear to Israel: not each and every one of them was chosen (Isaiah 10:22-23, 1:9); and some of those chosen are even Gentiles – outsiders (Hosea 2:23, 1:10) (25-29)!

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

- Why does modern man find this part of Scripture so offensive?

DAY 13

*The cart before the horse*

**THE PASSAGE**

**ROMANS 9:30-10:4**

**THE POINT** God chose (some of) Abraham’s descendants to be His special people. He gave them His Law as the written document declaring His covenant relationship with them, but the actual basis of the covenant was always His grace. Of course, obedience to His law was the appropriate response of all who acknowledged, as an act of faith, His gracious provision. Therefore, when Jesus came to seal the covenant with His own blood, faith in Him became the starting point. But, for the most part, God’s covenant people were already putting the emphasis in the wrong place, assuming that the righteousness required of them could be obtained by obedience to the Law, instead of a gift of His grace that led to obedience. They were

putting the cart before the horse, and Jesus became a “rock of offence” to them, as Isaiah had predicted (28:16, 8:14). When Gentiles, who didn’t have the Law, started being included among God’s people through faith in Jesus, this whole problem of wrong emphasis came into clearer focus.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Christ is the “end” (object, aim, focal point, purpose, perfection, completion, fulfilment) of the Law. He is the One to whom alone we (and Jews) must look, and depend on, for our salvation.

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

- Is “works righteousness” still a danger to the gospel of grace?

DAY 14

*The Gospel according to Moses*

**THE PASSAGE**

**ROMANS 10:5-13**

**THE POINT** Getting right with God has nothing to do with our doing some good thing; it is only to do with trusting in what the Messiah, Jesus, has already done for us. There is no point in making an effort to go up to heaven to seek Him out: He has already come down from there to find us! There is no point in trying to communicate with the dead to discover the secret of life: Christ, by His resurrection has already come back from there! Moses made it all clear enough in Deuteronomy 30:11-14: saving grace is not hard for man to come by, it only requires us to accept what God has already done for us, and to say so by our speech and life.

Scriptures.

- Acknowledging Jesus as the risen Lord, inwardly and sincerely, as well as outwardly, puts us right with God for ever. Public profession should follow the Spirit’s work in the heart (9-11).
- Any difference between Jew and Gentile is thus removed (12-13).

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Justification by faith is firmly embedded in the OT

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

- Many Jews believe that Messiah would come if they could all manage to keep God’s Law for just one day. How do Deuteronomy 30:11-14 and Romans 10:5-11 address this error? Is there any hope for Jews who persist in rejecting Jesus as the Christ?

DAY 15

*How beautiful are your feet?*

**THE PASSAGE**

**ROMANS 10:14-21**

**THE POINT** Proclaiming the Good News about Jesus is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for bringing people to faith in Him. Those who preach the gospel do so out of necessity (cf 1 Corinthians 9:16), but they are not to be discouraged by lack of response, because He who commissions them knows the hardness of man’s heart. The exciting thing is that, though so many in Israel might hear but so obstinately refuse to accept the message of salvation in Christ, many non-Israelite Gentiles will hear and believe (20).

the good news; we preach and many people hear the message; some who hear respond by believing the good news and calling out to Him in repentance and faith. Our going everywhere to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20) qualifies us as part of the “beautiful feet” brigade of Isaiah 52:7 (14-15).

- Just hearing the message of God’s salvation is of no use unless it is accompanied by an active commitment to believe, as Israel’s history throughout the whole OT so clearly proves (16-21).

**THE PARTICULARS**

- The process God has chosen to use to bring people to saving faith in Christ involves us: He lays it on our heart to proclaim

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

- Could anyone in your community use the excuse that they have not heard about Jesus? What are you doing about this?

DAY 16

*A (not insignificant) remnant*

**THE PASSAGE**

**ROMANS 11:1-6**

**THE POINT** The story so far: God chose Israel to be His covenant people and gave them certain irrevocable promises; the promises applied, not to all Abraham’s descendants without exception, but to a select line; the basis of God’s election was His grace alone; the biggest obstacle to Israel’s embracing salvation was not that they didn’t hear, but that they heard in a way that filtered out the grace component and concluded that they could earn their “righteousness” before God by performance of His Law; many Israelites were therefore missing out on the salvation God had promised them; moreover, God’s “salvation by grace” strategy always allowed for the inclusion of others outside Abraham’s family. Paul will now address the question, in

the light of all this, of the future of Israel as an entity apart from the Gentiles.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- The fact that many in Israel had forfeited their covenant rights could never mean the covenant itself had failed, or that God had rejected His people, Israel. Paul was a “Jacob-Rachel” Israelite, and he was saved by God’s sovereign, electing grace (1-2).
- God’s grace is much more generous than most of us realise, a lesson that even Elijah had to learn in 1 Kings 19:12-18 (2-6).

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

- Do you have too pessimistic a view concerning Israel today?

**DAY 17**

*For the Jew first*

**THE PASSAGE**

**ROMANS 11:7-16**

**THE POINT** Paul is keen for the Gentile Church, aware of its debt to the nation of Israel, to share his burden for their full salvation.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Within Israel, the covenant nation by birth, there is contained the elect Israel, the covenant people by new birth. The salvation the latter obtained by grace vindicates God's faithfulness (7).
- The Law (Deuteronomy 29:4), the Prophets (Isaiah 29:10) and the Writings (Psalm 69:22-23) all bear testimony to God's rejection of His people because of spiritual blindness and deafness (7-10).
- This was all part of God's "Plan A" (cf God does the harden-

ing in v. 7): many apostasise, but the saved-by-grace elect still vindicate God's faithfulness; the apostasy results in salvation being extended to Gentiles; salvation of Gentiles produces envy leading to greater saving grace among the apostate nation (11-12)!

- Paul wants Gentile believers to realise the important part they play in God's Plan, and to look forward to the salvation of the nation of Israel with the same enthusiasm he has for it (13-15).
- Israel has a primary role in God's Plan A (cf 1:16; 2:9-10); what happens to Israel cannot help but affect the whole Church (16).

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

- Should we be more actively involved in Jewish evangelism?

**DAY 18**

*Haughty cultural problems*

**THE PASSAGE**

**ROMANS 11:17-24**

**THE POINT** Paul now gets to the heart of the matter. The Church is only one tree. There is not a Gentile Church and a Jewish Church. But in that tree there are two different branch types: the one that is natural to the root stock; and the one that is a "foreign" graft. Both must recognise their interdependence as well as diversity.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Lest Gentile Christians should become proud because they have ousted the disobedient Jews as God's people, His Church, Paul reminds them of two important realities: first, from a human perspective they are an afterthought in God's Plan because His eternal covenant promises were given specifically

to the Jews; and secondly, they also run the risk of becoming established as the Church and then making the same mistake as the Jews had made by replacing grace with an emphasis on "works" and human achievement. This, of course, is a danger for the Church in every age; reformations can be very short-lived (17-21).

- In this whole process we see both sides of God's character at work in the gracious way He deals with sinful man, His just wrath and His loving-kindness, but all for our good. This serves as a warning against complacency and discouragement (22-24).

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

- Is there a place for Messianic (Jews only) churches today?

**DAY 19**

*Who are "all Israel"?*

**THE PASSAGE**

**ROMANS 11:25-32**

**THE POINT** God's covenant promises given to Israel are firm and eternal, and God is faithful. These promises refer to a nation, a city, and a land. Their extension into eternity indicates that they have in view, not the earthly land and city, but the heavenly Canaan and the New Jerusalem (cf Galatians 4:25-26; Revelation 21:1-2). In these chapters in Romans, Paul is holding in tension (a tension that is unavoidable when dealing with eternal issues within the limits of a time-space framework) two realities that God has revealed to us: (i) because of His commitment to the Patriarchs, their descendants are still particularly precious to God; and (ii) belonging to God is more to do

with faith than blood (eg 4:11), and since all the elect (OT/NT, Jew/Gentile, alike) are saved only through Christ's sacrifice (eg 3:21-26), there can be no distinction in the Church – in other words, all the OT promises are promises to the whole Church for whom Christ died. Both these truths are expressed throughout Scripture, especially in Paul's writings. So, what does Paul mean here by "so all Israel will be saved" (26)? It is probably best understood in terms of what it can't mean: it can't mean each and every Jew (a key to Paul's whole argument is God's electing grace within Israel); nor can it mean the nation of Israel as it persists in rejecting Messiah. But at least it ought to make us keener for Jewish evangelism!

**DAY 20**

*How unsearchable His judgements*

**THE PASSAGE**

**ROMANS 11:33-36**

**THE POINT** Paul acknowledges the complexity of the issues he has been grappling with concerning the place of Israel in God's future Plan. Of this he is absolutely sure: God knows what He is doing.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- God has revealed Himself in writing in the Scriptures, and in person in Jesus, His Son, making it clear that He is knowable, and that He wants to be known. But just as clearly, the holy God, the Creator who dwells in eternity, cannot be fully known by sinful man who is confined in time and space. Sadly, men have a view of God that is either too small, limiting Him by what is acceptable to the human mind, or one that is too

remote, ignoring His self-revelation in the Bible. Paul makes no such error (33f).

- All that God does for us is motivated by His grace; He owes us nothing. This was the lesson poor Job had to learn through all his suffering (Job 41:11; cf Jesus' words in Luke 17:10) (35).
- Paul ends his outburst of praise with an implied reference to the Trinity: "For from Him (the Father) and through Him (the Spirit) and to Him (the Son) are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen." There is nothing outside God's sovereign control (36).

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

- Can you accept Paul's statement in 9:19-21 and let God be God?



## Across Australia

### Cloning consternation

The Presbyterian Church of Australia wants to continue the ban on reproductive cloning and regards the recommendation to Parliament in favour of cloning with consternation. These views are made clear in its response to the Lockhart Committee report on the operation of the Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2002 and the Prohibition of Human Cloning Act 2002, and the current Patterson and Stott-Despoja bills before the Senate. The PCA said the church finds its place within the Christian tradition of the God-given value of human life from the very moment of conception and the equally strong conviction that the end, however worthy, never justifies the means. The church fully supports the recommendation for the continued ban on reproductive cloning, and the prescribed appropriate penalties for the misuse of these new technologies. For a full text of the statement, see [www.presbyterian.org.au](http://www.presbyterian.org.au) or contact Reverend Stefan Slucki on (08) 8296 0801.

### Sudan appeal

Philip Burns of Mission Partners-APWM Victoria has launched an appeal for the Presbyterian Church of Sudan. Moderator-General Bob Thomas, who has visited Sudan, has written to congregations encouraging them to support it. "I have seen at first hand the plight of our people there and the strenuous attempts our fellow Presbyterians are making to alleviate the suffering of their people," Mr Thomas's letter says.

"The church runs theological colleges in Khartoum and Malakal and a Christian Education Centre in Khartoum, and publishes a Sunday School curriculum called (delightfully) 'New Life'. In all of these endeavours it is short of money, materials and man-power. Pastors and evangelists are hard at work throughout the country and they are constantly seeing converts."

Send financial gifts to the PCV Office (156 Collins Street, Melbourne Vic 3000) by no later than 20 December to allow for their distribution by Victorian Moderator Grant Lawry who plans to visit Sudan in January.

### Elders' sacking confirmed

The Presbyterian Church of Victoria has upheld the suspension of 15 elders from the Trinity Camberwell church, all members of the group called the Fellowship, *The Age* newspaper has reported. The state assembly last month heard a number of appeals from Trinity's minister, elders and congregations. It upheld the actions of the Presbytery of Melbourne East in sacking the elders for failing to carry out their duties.

The clerk of the Presbyterian assembly, the Reverend John Wilson, said debate about the Fellowship appeals had taken fully half the assembly's four days. "It's very clear that assembly has upheld the presbytery," he said. He said it upheld the presbytery's right to intervene in Trinity because the situation there was "serious and grave". It upheld the presbytery's right to remove the elders – both as elders and as members of the Presbyterian Church – but it asked the presbytery to interview all the elders and decide their status as individuals rather than as a group.

The presbytery sacked the elders in February after receiving a written complaint from a young member at Trinity. In 1998 the state assembly produced a booklet, *Fractured Fellowship*, attacking Fellowship teachings. Canterbury minister Grant Lawry, who led the fight against the Fellowship, said the presbytery was happy to conduct a detailed investigation of individual elders. Trinity minister Philip Mercer has declined to comment to the newspaper.

### PCV Assembly

This year, the PCV Assembly could not finish its work in the set time and adjourned until 31 October. Missionary David Price spoke of the profound impact of short term missionary experience, the Rev. Don Elliot spoke of the Eltham team's visit to Malawi; Andrew and Suzy Vines spoke of their eight weeks in the Middle East as short-termers, and Donvale minister Gerald Vanderwert told how a church team worked on the new library at the Talua Training Centre Vanuatu.

The 2004 assembly appointed a strategy committee to investigate new evangelistic outreach and church planting. This year its work came to an end, and the assembly adopted a number of the committee's recommendations.

### NSW Assembly

In July 2006 NSW Assembly elected the Rev. D. K. Robson, minister emeritus as moderator and requested him to visit the presbyteries of Bathurst, Sydney North and Wagga Wagga.

The assembly celebrated the jubilee of the Rev. P. E. Boase's ordination, and welcomed eight new ministers to their first charges or appointments. It elected 10 ministers and 10 elders as its commissioners to the 2007 General Assembly of the PCA. In other moves, it required all congregations to take part in the National Church Life Survey, encouraged every parish in NSW to have a mission coordi-



## Presbyterian Theological Centre – Sydney

The PTC is the theological and missionary training college of the Presbyterian Church in NSW, which offers theological and pastoral training for ministry candidates of several denominations and independent students. The Centre also offers training for youth workers, church planters, women's workers and cross-cultural missionaries.



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nator to prayerfully establish relationships with missionaries, encouraged churches to pay for METRO Evangelism trainees and encouraged congregations to support the **Micah Challenge** and be actively involved in the campaign to achieve the **United Nations Millennium Goals**.

### Excellent counsel

**Dr Ed Welch** from **Westminster Theological Seminary** in Philadelphia gave 26 hours of lectures on issues in biblical counseling, as the **Presbyterian Theological College** in Melbourne held a postgraduate intensive week in August. More than 30 people attended the full-week course with close on 100 people attending the public lecture on the Wednesday evening. Dr Welch focused on specific counselling issues and how these can be addressed from a biblical base. Books written by Ed Welch as well as a 2 MP3 CD set of the complete lecture series and CD of the public lecture are available from PTC Media. Contact Mignon Goswell on 0400 880 515 or email [ptcmedia@presbyteriancollege.org](mailto:ptcmedia@presbyteriancollege.org).

### In the churches

**Mt Barker Presbyterian Church (SA)** has appointed **Wilf Crompton** and **Ray Bond** elders emeritus.

The **Presbytery of Gippsland (Vic.)** has declared **Drouin** vacant. Send enquiries to Mrs S. Bruce, 1 Charlou Court Drouin Vic 3818.

**The Mount Gambier Presbyterian**

**Charge (SA)** recently reappointed the **Rev. Ian Touzel** as community liaison pastor until the end of 2008. He has held the position since January 2005

### St Ives turns 50

A church service to mark the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the **St Ives** congregation (NSW) was held on 24 September. Worship was led by NSW Moderator **David Robson**. The congregation included the first inducted minister of St. Ives, the **Rev. Lock Finlay** and the local Federal MP, **Dr Brendon Nelson**.

### Souls stirred

The **Ministry Training Scheme** held a training day at the **PTC Melbourne** on 27 October. The main speaker was the **Rev. Mike Raiter**, the new principal of the **Bible College of Victoria** and author of the popular book *Stirrings of the Soul*.

### American adventure

Due to a generous donation, **Albion Park (NSW) minister Gordon Coleman** and final year PTC student **Douglas Haley** were able to attend the assembly of the **Presbyterian Church in America**. The pair said it reminded them of their shared identity and heritage as Presbyterians, and they heard outstanding theological figures in **Sinclair Ferguson**, **R.C. Sproul**, **Mark Dever** and **Ligon Duncan**, who led seminars.

The assembly was a family affair with

many of the ministers bringing their wives and children. The PC in America is a healthy growing church of close to 400,000 members. At the nightly service, 1500 ministers and elders plus their families gathered to take communion and to hear the message of the Great Shepherd clearly and faithfully proclaimed.



### Around the World

#### Global faith rocketing

Nearly 500 young Christian leaders from more than 100 countries gathered in Malaysia recently to listen to mission experts discuss the rapid growth of global evangelicalism. The **Younger Leaders Gathering** is a ministry of the **Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation** where emerging leaders in churches, ministries and the marketplace aged 25 to 35 convene to learn new leadership skills, strengthen their spiritual life, and form networks.

**Jason Mandryck**, co-author of the mission prayer guide *Operation World*, said that although Christianity has barely kept pace with world population growth over the last century, evangelicalism is "far and away the fastest growing major religious movement in the world today", growing at twice the pace of Islam and three times as fast as the overall world population. Most significantly, the global growth is seen in countries such as Brazil, China, Bangladesh and Nigeria which have "exploding" Christian populations. Mandryck says the **Mongolian** church is now the most efficient missions force, sending one missionary for every 222 Christians.

*Christian Post*

#### 'Lord' inspires violence: claim

**Church of England** leaders have warned that calling God "He" encourages men to beat their wives. They told churchgoers they must think twice before they refer to God as "He" or "Lord" in case it led to domestic abuse. In new guidelines for bishops and priests, the church blamed "uncritical use of masculine imagery" for encouraging men to behave violently towards women. They also warned that clergy must reconsider the language they use in sermons and check the hymns they sing to remove signs of male oppression.



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The recommendation, endorsed by **Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams**, puts question marks over swaths of Christian teaching and practice. It throws doubt on whether the Lord's Prayer should continue using that name and begin "Our Father".

"The guidelines claim abuse is common in marriage and say this is because marriage heightens a sense among husbands that they own their wives. The document prompted an outcry from conservative clergy, who accused the **Archbishop's Council**, which produced the guidelines, of distorting theology for a "feminist agenda".

*Daily Telegraph, London*

### Copts protest abductions

**T**housands of Coptic Christians have attempted to take to the streets of Cairo, but have been stopped by the clergy for fear of sectarian violence. Christians are becoming increasingly frustrated over the ongoing abduction of teenage Christian girls by Islamists. The girls are believed to be abducted so they can be forcefully married to Muslim men, sometimes up to twice their age.

In a number of recent cases the Egyptian authorities and police have been aware of the location of the abducted girls but have forbidden affected families from seeing or talking to their child. Neither have they brought any of the kidnapers to justice.

### Teenager escapes Muslims

**A**n Egyptian Christian teenager escaped her Muslim kidnapers last month hours after they had drugged her on a public bus. They threatened to rape her and convert her to Islam if her family did not leave their Nile Delta city of El-Mahala el-Kobra. **Laurence Wagih Emil**, 16, escaped the ground-floor room where she was being held in Cairo while her captors were away breaking their Ramadan fast. Her father, **Wagih Emil**, had received several

threatening text messages from his daughter's mobile phone. "Take the rest of your daughters and leave the city, or you will lose them one by one," said one. "The girl is not accepting easily, but she will embrace Islam for sure." Before family members recovered her, State Security Investigation officials interviewing Laurence Emil told her she would never see her parents again unless she reported a false story denying the kidnapping.

*Compass Direct*

### Rioters destroy churches

**N**early 5000 Christians were displaced and six were injured on September 20th, when Muslim rioters destroyed at least 18 churches, 20 Christian homes, and 40 Christian shops in **Dutse, Jigawa state, Nigeria**. After a Muslim young man made several unsuccessful advances on a female Christian, he angrily reacted by calling her a "fake Christian" who follows a "useless Jesus." She responded by telling the boy he followed "a useless prophet". Furious, the boy raised an alarm through the town, proclaiming a Christian lady blasphemed Muhammad. She was taken to the local police station and kept in custody to diffuse the potentially volatile situation.

In Indonesia, a militant Islamic mob, infuriated by reports that Christians were scheduling revival meetings at the **Indonesia Evangelical Mission Church** in Aceh, set the worship centre ablaze on 1 September. Local Muslims from the town of **Siompi**, which was the first in Indonesia to implement Shariah law, reduced the building to ashes in an attempt to wipe out those in their province not bowing down to Allah. Church members have moved their worship services to a local house, as they refuse to buckle under Muslim attacks.

### Teenager faces life

**A** young Pakistani Christian has been jailed on suspicion of ripping book pages

containing Quranic verses. He appealed to Punjabi police because the sole evidence against **Shahid Masih**, 17, was the testimony of a Muslim man already accused of the same crime. If convicted, Masih will serve a life sentence.

### NZ no to gay ministers

**T**hose involved in a sexual relationship outside marriage – whether homosexual, lesbian or heterosexual – have been barred from becoming ministers or elders in the **Presbyterian Church of New Zealand**.

The church's General Assembly confirmed its 2004 rule at its recent biennial meeting. The motion that the church "may not accept for training, license, ordain or induct anyone involved in a sexual relationship outside of faithful marriage between a man and a woman" was carried by 230 votes to 124 – a 65 per cent approval.

Meanwhile, top lawyers have told New Zealand's **Human Rights Commission** that churches are within their legal rights to ban homosexual ministers, according to Wellington's *Dominion Post* newspaper. It said gay rights groups are outraged that the Human Rights Act does not forbid churches from refusing to ordain homosexuals.

A Human Rights Commission paper says the exclusion is allowable, providing it can be "properly described as a matter of religious belief in the relevant church".

### Eritrea tortures Christians

**R**ecent reports from *Compass Direct* indicate that the appalling religious situation in Eritrea continues to deteriorate. CD reports: "Newly compiled statistics smuggled out of Eritrea indicate that at least 1918 Eritrean citizens are imprisoned and being subjected to torture and forced labor because of their religious beliefs.

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According to a detailed list obtained by Compass last month, 95 percent of these known religious prisoners of conscience are Christians.”

### Christian in top job

**Ban Ki-noon**, South Korea's foreign affairs minister, has been confirmed as the next **UN secretary-general**, succeeding **Kofi Annan**.

A Christian, he is a member of a “**group without Church**”, a serious organisation that emerged in Japan at the beginning of last century.

Its members, mostly intellectuals, make the gospel a source of inspiration for their private and public life.

*Asia News*



### On the Agenda

### Bishop banned for swearing

**David Jenkins**, the former **Bishop of Durham** who survived a storm in the 1980s when he questioned the literal truth of the resurrection, has been banned from preaching in two of his local churches for swearing in the pulpit.

Jenkins, 81, was barred after using the words “bloody” and “damn” in a sermon. The ban came after complaints from members of the congregation.

Despite his retirement, Jenkins has retained his reputation for fiery sermons. But he concedes that, during an address in the parish of **Romaldkirk** and **Laithkirk** in County Durham, he became carried away when railing against splits in the Anglican communion over homosexual priests.

Jenkins has admitted using the words in a sermon but said: “The main reason for people not believing in God is the behaviour of people who do believe in God. I am fed up with the disgraceful quarrelling among Anglicans when they should be addressing major world questions. I suppose there was a bit of anger and swearing but I get worked up in the pulpit and I get quite lively. Dogmatism is destroying the reasonableness and realism of religion.”

**Peter Midwood**, the rector of the parish, said he had felt forced to act after receiving complaints. He barred Jenkins, now the assistant bishop of **Ripon and Leeds**, from preaching in the three churches in the parish. Jenkins was later given a partial reprieve after parishioners wrote to **John Packer, Bishop of Ripon and Leeds**, calling for him to be reinstated. He is now allowed to preach at **Cotherstone**, one of the churches.

Jenkins has long been a strong supporter of civil partnerships and last year became one of the first clergymen to bless such a union between two men, one of whom was a vicar.

*Sunday Times*

### Christian women raped

**Y**oung Christian women are among the preferred targets of Iraq's growing abduction problem with many being raped and some committing suicide as a result of the shock, violence and shame they experience.

*AsiaNews* says that this is all happening in Baghdad where kidnapping has become a growth industry. Criminal gangs are lining their pockets as the number of victims grows and the line-ups at border posts grow even longer with people trying to flee the country.

Christians from any denominations, clergy or laity alike, are one of the preferred targets in the capital.

In Mosul recently, another priest was abducted: **Fr Paulos Eskandar**, from the **Syrian Orthodox Church**. A huge ransom has already been asked.

Sources in some communities of nuns in Baghdad have relayed other stories they witnessed. Last month two young Christian women were abducted but under different circumstances: one at home as her helpless family could do nothing but watch; the other, at an open market where four armed men spirited her away in a car leaving behind a distraught mother.

Often incidents do not end with the prisoner's release. In one case in Baghdad, the victim committed suicide after the ransom was paid and she went home because of the torture and sexual violence she suffered.

In another case, a young woman talked to her family by phone and told them: “I'm dead”, referring to being gang raped. She eventually committed suicide whilst still in the hands of her tormentors.

Unofficial estimates put the number of young women and girls abducted in two weeks of October at 12.

Meanwhile Iraqi Christians are increasingly scared. Sources in northern Iraq told *AsiaNews* that “hundreds of families are on the run, fleeing towards the border with Syria”.

### Church fights for custody

*By Daniel Burke*

**W**hen married parents break up, the most contentious legal scums are often over who gets custody of the children. When congregations walk away from the **Presbyterian Church (USA)**, the biggest battles are often about who keeps church property.

As the 2.4 million-member denomination deals with fallout from its June deci-

#### Clerical Assistant

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Applications will close on 30th November 2006.

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Applications will close on 30th November 2006.

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sion to loosen bans on gay clergy, these "custody" battles are elbowing aside theological disputes.

**Jerry Van Marter**, director of the **Presbyterian News Service**, said at least five of the denomination's 11,200 congregations have decided to leave the denomination since its national assembly in June, when delegates voted to give local churches more leeway in applying rules against gay clergy.

Conservatives are arguing that if the denomination can overlook rules against gay clergy, then it should also overlook rules that require breakaway congregations to leave their property behind.

The **New Wineskins Association of Churches**, a network of 128 congregations unhappy with the direction of the denomination, recently asked church leaders for a moratorium on disciplinary action against dissident clergy and congregations. The group also urged the denomination to refrain from legal action over church property.

The church's top elected officer, **Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick**, refused, insisting that church leaders "are bound to uphold the constitution of the church and do not have the power unilaterally to set aside any portion".

Moreover, church leaders say the constitution is ironclad when it comes to

property. Local congregations hold church property in trust for the denomination. If a congregation wants to leave, the stained glass stays.

*Washington Post*

## Christians fear genocide

By *Barney Zwartz*

**P**eople wanting to hear an international expert on Islam in Melbourne last month were asked to sign a document declaring that they were Christian before they could enter.

About 100 people came to the **Presbyterian Assembly Hall** in Collins Street to hear **Patrick Sookhdeo**, director of the London-based **Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity**, talk about the persecuted church in Muslim countries. All signed a form giving their name and church membership.

Organiser **David Palmer**, a Presbyterian minister and convener of the **Victorian Church and Nation Committee**, said restricting the audience to Christians was a precaution because of Victoria's religious hatred laws. "We regret having to do it, but we felt it was necessary. We don't want people coming to hear the Koran quoted and become offended, and then we have to appear in court," Mr

Palmer said.

Dr Sookhdeo also led a two day seminar on the challenge of Islam, exploring the relationship between church, Islam and modern Australia from a Christian perspective. More than 200 people came, mostly Presbyterians.

Dr Sookhdeo – a former Muslim, now an Anglican priest and adviser to the British Government and NATO – told the meeting that Christians in Iraq face genocide but are ignored by Western Governments who refuse to intervene.

Dr Sookhdeo said Muslim extremists in Iraq and other countries were telling Christians they had to convert to Islam, leave or die.

"Christians are caught in the middle. There is no safe place any longer for the Christian community," he said. "In Baghdad, Christian women who refused to be fully covered were beheaded with members of their families. Christians are told, 'because you don't fight the Americans you must pay a poll tax'. Christian girls are kidnapped and raped while police stand by."

He said Sunni and Shia terror groups both targeted Christians, and Americans refused to intervene. But Christians would be worse off if the Coalition pulled out.

*The Age*

## youth worker

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# Christian, know thyself

*Low self-esteem melts away in Christ; so does arrogance.*

**M**ost people nowadays know the importance of self-image. Coaches in sport always knew it: perceiving that those who see themselves as winners do better than those who expect to lose, they saw passionate pep-talks of the “you-can-do-it” sort as vital to the success of their trainees. And they were right.

Counseling pundits confirm that in all departments of life our view of ourselves programs our behavior, so that our ideas of what we can and can't do become self-fulfilling prophecies. How true! A bright person I know suffered ten years of academic disaster through internalising the assurance, dumped on him in grade two, that he was no good at schoolwork. This is typical.

Embedded in our self-image is our sense of worth. Children starved of affirmation and affection at home usually take into adult life a low self-image — a sense, that is, of lacking real value, being a nobody, counting for nothing. As in some communities it is said that if you're not Dutch you're not much, so the world is full of emotional cripples, including some Dutch, who deep down feel they are “not much”, despite being, as such folk often are, brainy, competent, and by worldly standards successful.

**T**his feeling is not a rational judgment, but an emotionally-charged attitude functioning as tinted spectacles through which one's mind gazes as it thinks about oneself in relation to others. A Snoopy cartoon I saw tried to laugh it off. (“You look dreadful.” “Well, I feel inferior.” “Don't worry, lots of people have that feeling.” “What, that they're inferior?” “No, that you're inferior.”) But those who



**J. I. Packer**

experience inferiority feelings cannot laugh them off like that. They come to stay, and they do much harm.

A low self-image spawns inhibited and compulsive behavior of all sorts. Insecurity, instability, lack of self-respect, spinelessness, cynicism, quarrelsomeness, pushiness and bluster, isolation and withdrawal, passive or predatory relationships,

*As God's adopted children who will inherit glory, our task for time and eternity is to glorify the One who thus glorifies us.*

even drug-dependence, and promiscuity, may result. And though a poor self-concept is fairly easily diagnosed, counselors can rarely do anything to change it.

Today's jargon of self-image, self-esteem, self-worth, inferiority feelings, etc., is unknown to the Scriptures, yet they speak directly to the problem.

First, the gospel announces God's love to all of us sinners and teaches us to measure it by setting three things together: how guilty and nasty our holy Creator sees us to be; how far He went to save us, giving His Son to taste the hell we deserved in order to secure our rescue; and the reality of full forgiveness, acceptance, restoration to fellowship and clean slate, God's free gift through Christ to penitent believers. The gospel takes us lower in self-abhorrence and despair than inferiority feelings ever do, and raises us to an awestruck joy that those with a “good” self-image never reach. From this a changed view of ourselves must result.

However unloved and worthless we once felt, and however much self-hate and self-condemnation we once nursed, we must now see that by loving us enough to redeem us God gave us value, and by forgiving us completely He obligated us to

forgive ourselves and made it sin for us not to. So the old way of thinking and feeling about ourselves must be driven out by a new one, which is to last for the rest of our lives.

Second, the gospel tells us that as believers we become new creatures in Christ. Born again we enter a new kind of life. Dying to sin as God changes our hearts, we rise in and with Christ to a spirit-indwelt state marked by the discovery in ourselves of the inner inclinations of Jesus' own manhood. This miracle of mercy gives us new identity, which our self-image must henceforth express. The new self-image is threefold.

**I**n relation to God, we must see ourselves as inheritors. In antiquity the childless rich adopted adults to uphold the family name as recipients of the family fortune. As God's adopted children who will inherit glory, our task for time and eternity is to glorify the One who thus glorifies us.

In relation to life, we must see ourselves as travelers: not permanent residents, but pilgrims going home, here to serve but not to settle down. Secular materialism is earthbound, treating this life as all there is, but Christians must look beyond earth (wonderfully good) to heaven (infinitely better), and be ready to let anything go rather than forfeit glory.

In relation to worldly pulls, sin's promptings, and Satanic prowling, we must see ourselves as fighters: soldiers of Christ who advance by battling opposition with the armor and weapons that Christ supplies.

(There is a classic book on this subject: Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*; but nobody is going to read that old stuff nowadays, are they?)

Christians who see themselves in these terms are realists who know who they are, and their new self-image programs them for right living. They are prepared for losses, crosses, changes, and conflicts; they bow low, walk tall, and fight hard all the time.

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



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# Hot topics

*Issues that made the media*

*This is an edited version of a speech Barney Zwartz, religion editor of The Age, gave to the Victorian Association of Religious Educators in Melbourne last month.*



**Barney  
Zwartz**

A man was asked to say Grace in Latin at Cambridge University. The poor chap knew neither Latin nor prayers but he did know detergents, so he intoned “Omo, Lux, Domestos, Brobat, Ajax. Amen”. Everyone said “Amen” and the meal proceeded. I feel a little like that man, because I have no special expertise and I am addressing a group of people who do. But I hope to open a certain window on the world.

I plan to pick out a few important issues I have come across through the year, most of which can spark discussion in the classroom.

Perhaps the biggest issue of the day is the relationship between Islam and the rest of the world, ranging from terrorism to Israel-Palestine, to India-Pakistan, to Muslim minorities in the West, to hatred of the West in Muslim-majority countries, to persecution of minorities, and, not least, Western attitudes to Islam.

When I began writing about religion I knew very few Muslims, now I have met hundreds. The one thing I have learned is that all these aspects are enormously complex and nuanced. I want to make six brief comments.

First, there is no one Islam. Muslims identify as Sunni, Shia, Sufi, Salafist, Wahhabi or other sub-groups. Muslims in Melbourne come from 63 countries, and often have less in common with each other than with other ethnic groups (for example Lebanese Muslims may have more in common with Lebanese Christians than with Malay or Sudanese Muslims). Melbourne is much further down the interfaith road than Sydney, and the religious temperature is lower here.

Second, the West *has* inflamed Muslim resentment foolishly. Whether or not America was right to invade Iraq, and I confess that I was torn at the time, there is no doubt that it has created a new generation of insurgents or that since World War II Muslims have had some legitimate

resentments. Think of the Americans overthrowing the Iranian government to install the Shah in 1953, for example.

Third, though there are some tensions here, Australia and America are far better off than Britain and France, both of whom have a vast Muslim underclass. The British and French have taken opposite approaches: the first inclined perilously close to appeasement, the second dismissive. Australian Muslim immigrants, until the recent waves of refugees, were largely professional and middle class, who assimilated well and make valuable contributions. Of this I am sure: only Muslims can resolve the internal problems of international Islam, and Muslim minorities in the West hold the key.

Fourth, the Pope’s Regensburg speech, citing a 13th century Byzantine emperor that the only new things Islam brought were evil and inhuman. I wrote at the time that it was probably an innocent remark in an academic context; but there are good arguments that it might have been deliberate. Either way, though, he has to be able to say such things. It’s bizarre to prove Islam really is a religion of peace by firebombing churches and shooting nuns. Author Caroline Miley summed it up in a nutshell: “Every time free people apologise to bullying extremists for exercising our freedom of speech, every time we capitulate, we give up a little more of that freedom. And we do it because we are afraid.”

Fifth, the same issue, writ small, was apparent in the Islamic Council of

Victoria’s case against Catch the Fire and two pastors for vilifying Muslims, brought under Victoria’s religious hatred law in 2002. From the first I could see why the Islamic Council felt it had to bring the case. It was six months after September 11, when suspicion was high, and some outrageous and unfair claims had been made. Another problem was the role of a Muslim staff member of the Equal Opportunity Commission, who alerted Muslims to the seminar and insisted they attend. It seems she wanted to engineer this case. I could also clearly appreciate the Christian arguments.

Recently, though, I’ve become more worried about the vilification law. What helped solidify my conviction was what the Muslims’ barrister said at the Christians’ appeal in the Supreme Court. He claimed that the law should not only ban vilification of Muslims, it should outlaw unfair criticism of the religion itself. The law explicitly doesn’t do this, and if it did we would have a milder version of Pakistan’s blasphemy law. We are awaiting the ruling on the appeal.

Sixth, some Christians apparently see me as an apologist for Islam. I don’t think Muslims do, by the way. A couple of years ago I was given a peace award for promoting interfaith efforts, and a Muslim barrister told me as I walked back to my table that I didn’t deserve it and shouldn’t have accepted it. Anyway, I certainly do not see myself as an apologist. Nor, in my professional life, am I an apologist for Christianity. My job is to cover religion as well and in as balanced a way as I can for a secular newspaper.

That said, my personal position, as a Christian, is that what I want for Australian Muslims is exactly the same as what I want for Christian minorities in Muslim countries: equal rights and freedoms, especially to practise their religion free from violence, intimidation and bullying.

Most Muslim states pay lip service to human rights but make them second to sharia law, which entrenches discrimination. Non-Muslims are very much second-class citizens. Pope Benedict’s line, with its emphasis on reciprocity, is timely

***Muslims are right to demand religious freedom in the West; it’s time they allowed it in Muslim countries.***

and important. Muslims are right to demand religious freedom in the West; it's time they allowed it in Muslim countries.

I have written that nothing Muslims in Australia face comes close to the hatred, persecution and violence that is often the plight of Christians and other minorities in Muslim countries. Even so, that doesn't justify discrimination or prejudice against Muslims in this country.

The second issue I want to raise concerned what I consider the most important article I have written in 2006. Based on a paper to Melbourne University by an American Catholic theologian William Cavanaugh, it was about the myth of religious violence, that is the conventional wisdom that religion is particularly prone to violence. (However, as that article was reprinted in *AP* in July, I won't repeat the argument here.)

Another big issue right now is separation of church and state. The Australian Democrats are working hard to make that an election issue. Their 23-question online survey on the subject went amusingly wrong when Christians mounted a campaign. Instead of the usual 1000 responses, they got 40,000, overwhelmingly opposed to the answers they wanted, so they refused to release the results.

The separation concept is widely misunderstood to mean that Christians should be silent in the public arena and not try to impose their views. Non-Christians use it to try to keep Christian views out of politics. But that's not what the separation of church and state means, here or in America.

Historically, it means that there is no religion established by the state – unlike England, for example, or Saudi Arabia or Poland – and is intended to protect freedom of religion, not ensure an absence of religion. The US Constitution's first

***I want to keep the church out of government too – but for a different reason, to protect the church.***



amendment makes this plain. It says "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". This promotes a freedom for religion, not a freedom from religion.

Secularists such as Democrat leader Lyn Allison seem disingenuous to me. They want their values privileged over religious values. And by religious values they always mean conservative ones. Until recently the Democrats happily had a Uniting Church minister as one of their senators – but he inclined to the left.

In June I was invited to speak to a forum of secularists on church and state, entitled keeping God out of Government. I told them I wanted to keep the church out of government too – but for a different reason, to protect the church. Where the separation breaks down, it is usually to the detriment of the church. An example was 18th century England, where bishops were appointed by the state based on how they would vote in the House of Lords. Sydney Archbishop Peter Jensen once told me he was terribly concerned about Archbishop Hollingworth becoming Governor-General, not because it blurred church and state but because he was giving up a higher calling for a lower.

I told the secularists that much of their angst about the relationship between church and state is fuelled by prejudice and paranoia. In my job I have come across a lot of fundamentalism and big-

otry, and the most extreme form has been from secularists and atheists who refuse to acknowledge the possibility of any merit in any religious position and who deny that anyone could get there in good conscience unless they were intellectually or emotionally defective.

Secular hostility is built largely on two pervasive myths which have become conventional wisdom. One is that religion is necessarily divisive whereas secular ideologies are not. This descends from the Enlightenment assumption that reason is defined precisely in opposition to religious faith. No serious philosopher holds that any more. Secular humanism has been the dominant political philosophy for much of the 20th century; like Christianity, it faces a bitter struggle in the 21st. I told them that they, like me, were dinosaurs. They were simply the Jurassic to my Triassic, a later model.

The second myth is one Christians find as irritating as humanists do the religious claim to moral superiority, and that is the humanists' claim to epistemological superiority. That is, they say they know; we merely believe. And anything good in humanism it took from Christianity anyway.

Peter Costello caused outrage when he went to Hillsong, Australia's biggest church, and endorsed the 10 Commandments. I asked the secularists, would they be outraged if he'd come to their conference and endorsed their values? In fact, wasn't that precisely what the next speaker, Lynn Allison, was going to do – and wasn't that why they invited her?


How things have changed. 19th century statesman Lord Melbourne said, on hearing an evangelical preacher: "Things have come to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade the sphere of the private life."

Perhaps the most important truth you can teach your students is the importance of worldview – that set of assumptions by which we make sense of life – and the myth of neutrality. As I told the secularist conference, I am weary of trying to rebut the assertion that my philosophy is value-laden, blind, and contrary to evidence, whereas secular humanism is value-neutral, rational and evidence-based.

Philosophers such as Hilary Putnam (not a Christian) have shown that even such concepts as scientific truth are not neutral but part of a canon of beliefs and shaped very much by context and practice.

The point is, a worldview either

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includes God or it doesn't. Neither of these positions is neutral, because there is no neutral position. It's like what Sydney Smith said of two fishwives hurling insults at each other across an Edinburgh alleyway: those two will never agree; they are arguing from different premises.

Christians often concede too much in this area. If they are right, God is sovereign in all areas of life: from physics and mathematics to relationships and ethics. It's all God's world. But it's not that we are better, and we should avoid giving the impression that we think we are – common grace means that non-Christians can discover truth and be profoundly moral too.

A big story for Melbourne, which the city will watch with interest, is the new Anglican archbishop Philip Freier, who will be consecrated next month. Walking up and down outside the cathedral in the cold on the night he was elected, I thought of another Anglican bishop who was noted for the brevity of his sermons and conversation. At a function, he brought the mayoress to despair. "Some tea, bishop?" "No tea." "Some coffee, bishop?" "No coffee". "Some whisky and soda, bishop?" "No soda."

I don't believe Freier will be as laconic. Former Anglican Archbishop Peter Watson and Catholic Archbishop Denis Hart are both fine men, but they are retiring personalities when it comes to a public profile. It is important both for Christians and society at large that the church has a credible and intelligent public profile. I think and hope Freier may provide that. Also, though he faces big challenges in Melbourne, he doesn't owe allegiance to any of the groups, and that will allow him some flexibility. I think he may prove a fine leader.

**M**y final concern today is, what next for Christianity? Clearly, the church in the West faces huge challenges. Numbers will probably continue to dwindle, especially as older Christians die and are not replaced. But the church will survive because it offers community and it offers hope at a time when both are in decline. Once people used to be convinced by Christianity, then come to church. These days, more commonly they come to church for the sense of belonging, then become convinced.

Theologian Alister McGrath says Christianity has had a new injection of energy in the developing world. It's flourishing because it combines the spiritual and social, while offering a sense of iden-

tity and belonging that secular counterparts have never managed. Further, the scales have fallen from people's eyes about the failings of secular ideologies, from communism to free-market capitalism.

But social commentator Os Guinness thinks humanism has also had a restorative injection. He says optimistic humanism – with its belief in reason and progress and science as an alternative to religion and morals – collapsed after the '60s, giving way to postmodernism. But globalisation has given a new surge of life to humanism: the idea that the world is one, and we are all becoming more prosperous and free and it will all trickle down.

The new dominant ideology will be a non-humanistic secularism. One mark of this philosophy is that humans have no dignity beyond the animals; another is that free will is a delusion. We are merely a set of genes aiming to replicate themselves, according to Richard Dawkins, and

***Evangelicals have never tried so hard to be relevant, and never have they been more irrelevant, Guinness charges.***

consciousness is merely electro-chemical activity in the brain. The modern world is very rationalistic, Guinness says. It wants to reduce everything to technique, including faith – 12 steps to this, seven steps to that.

The challenge for Christians is to stay faithful under intense pressure. Evangelicals have never tried so hard to be relevant, and never have they been more irrelevant, Guinness charges. This is because they try to relate to secular society on its terms and get seduced instead.

**I**n coming decades, people will keep their faith, but it will be corrupted. Much teaching in Western churches is already unrecognisable as the teaching of Jesus. And the postmodern church has lost the link between belief and behaviour. Guinness says: "Faith everywhere has lost its authority. It's just a preference. We've never had a higher view of Scripture, yet the chaos of evangelical behaviour is extreme, such as the incidence of pornography among pastors."

But let's close on a note of optimism: G.K. Chesterton wrote early last century that at least five times the church had gone to the dogs, but each time it was the dog that died. It will surely be the same this time too. ap

## Assistant Minister

### North Sydney-Greenwich Presbyterian Church

The parish churches of North Sydney and Greenwich serve Sydney's lower north shore and draw their congregations from a wide geographic area and from a variety of nationalities. Greenwich has a small but growing congregation and has experienced considerable outreach in recent years. There is a joint session and each congregation has its own committee of management.

This position will become vacant on 1st February, 2007 following the acceptance of a call to Epping by the Rev. Matthew Oates.

A challenge now presents for a committed individual to continue the expansion of the Greenwich congregation, with a particu-

lar emphasis on continuing to attract families, supporting and growing the Sunday School and building the profile of the church in the local community.

The ideal candidate will have the energy, enthusiasm and spiritual strength to work autonomously to achieve Greenwich's goals and the understanding and flexibility to work with the session, committees of management and the minister of North Sydney. This is an exciting opportunity to consolidate on the recent developments in Greenwich and to work closely with a highly experienced and respected minister, whilst enjoying the freedom to influence the development of a growing congregation.

**Interested candidates are invited to apply to the Rev. Dr. Paul Logan, Minister, St. Peter's Presbyterian Church, P.O. Box 682, North Sydney, NSW, 2059, or via email [plogan@tig.com.au](mailto:plogan@tig.com.au) or telephone 02 9955 1662.**

Applications close on 15th December, 2006.

# prayer

**NOVEMBER 2006**

- 21 Joy Hill *mission partners* (APWM) worker from Donvale, Melbourne in Bosnia as a secretarial worker with Pioneers.
- 22 Pray for the Interim moderator, preachers and filling of the vacancy in Moree parish NSW including Garah, Poppinguy and Boomi with about 135 c&a (communicants and adherents), 20 yf (younger folk – Sunday School and youth) and 7 e (elders).
- 23 Creek Road parish, Carina, Brisbane with about 285 c&a, 270 yf and 14 e; Peter and Joy Barson.
- 24 Paul and Carol Lukins *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Condobolin in Ethiopia as agricultural and church planting ministry with SIM International.
- 25 Sue Poynter *mission partners* (APWM) worker from Canterbury, Melbourne in Japan in English teaching and music with Overseas Missionary Fellowship.
- 26 Pray for the Interim moderator, preachers and filling of the vacancy in South East Mallee patrol parish comprising Pyramid Hill, Boort and Wycheproof Vic. with about 75 c&a, 18 yf and 3 e.
- 27 Leeton-Yanco par. with about 150 c&a, 20 yf and 8 e; Richard and Karen Keith.
- 28 Toowoomba North par. Qld incl. St David's and Geeham with about 210 c&a, 30 yf and 7 e; Andrew and Simone Clarke.
- 29 Mt Evelyn par. Melbourne with about 40 c&a, 15 yf and 4 e; Mark and Linda Crabb.
- 30 Pray for the churches and nation of Scotland, and renewal of its Christian heritage.

**DECEMBER 2006**

- 1 Presbytery of Darling Downs, Qld: 7 parishes and 12 home mission stations totaling 36 congregations with about 1615 c&a and 580 yf, 1 school chaplain, 2 theological candidates, 3 retired ministers. Walter Jones clerk.
- 2 Robert and Jeanette Duncanson from Melton, Vic. as they prepare to re-establish a mission church in Darwin, and

- Dennis and Glenys Tranter (Australian Indigenous Ministries, Borraloola) as they begin work part time in the new NT Tablelands PIM Patrol.
- 3 John and Denise Dickson *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Parramatta City church, Sydney in Thailand through English, children's and women's work with Pioneers.
- 4 Eltham par. Melbourne with about 80 c&a, 25 yf and 4 e; Don and Anne Elliott.
- 5 The 24 members of the Youth Partners work party now at Talua, Vanuatu working on the library building, and funds to complete the project by August 2007.
- 6 Bowral-Mittagong parish south of Sydney with about 120 c&a, 45 yf and 6 e; Doug and Dell McPherson.
- 7 Alex Kowalwenko *mission partners* (APWM) Worker from Parramatta City church, Sydney in Portugal through training ministry with European Christian Mission.
- 8 Antioch Korean par. Strathfield Sydney with about 250 c&a and 110 yf; Ki-Ok and Sun Ok Jung, Hongki and Esther Ahn.
- 9 New Life h. m. stn Camira, Brisbane with about 30 c&a and 5 e; Will Henderson.
- 10 Presbytery of New England, NSW: 6 parishes and 2 home mission stations totaling 17 congregations with about 825 c&a and 245 yf, 1 school chaplain. Keith Walker clerk.
- 11 Albury par. NSW incl. Cookinburra with about 210 c&a, 90 yf and 13 e; Bruce and Jan Gorton.
- 12 Heidelberg par. Melbourne with about 45 c&a, 12 yf and 4 e; Alan and Virginia Every.
- 13 Fayek and Samira *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Campbelltown and Revesby, Sydney reaching out to Middle Eastern people and educating church people with APWM.
- 14 Newcastle Samoan par. NSW with about 70 c&a, 105 yf and 13 e; Setu and Faasinoala Amosa.
- 15 Ron and Jean Lyons, working among indigenous people at Weipa, Gulf of Carpentaria.
- 16 Terry Sadler and Judith in his new role as "roving padre" promoting the work of the PIM.
- 17 All communities and families affected by the devastating drought and all fighting bush fires.
- 18 Maitland par. NSW incl. Largs and Paterson with about 110 c&a, 20 yf and 8 e; Stephen and Jenine de Plater.
- 19 Kogarah h. m. stn Sydney with about 55 c&a, 10 yf and 8 e; Tim Ravenhall.
- 20 Presbytery of Melbourne West 5 parishes and 4 home mission stations totaling 11 congregations with about 755 c&a and 165 yf, 2 theological candidates, and 1 minister under jurisdiction. Bruce Riding clerk.
- 21 Scottsdale par. Tas. incl. Bridport with about 80 c&a, 30 yf and 5 e; Greg and Catherine Munro.
- 22 Lower Clarence par. comprising Maclean, Yamba and Lawrence with about 190 c&a, 50 yf and 15 e; Mark and Lyndal Mitchell, Mark and Lois Cooper-White.
- 23 Elspeth Slater *mission partners* (APWM) worker from Canterbury, Vic. among pastors' wives and women Bible College students in Burkina Faso, west Africa with SIM.
- 24 South Burnett h. m. stn, Qld comprising Kingaroy, Wondai and Goomeri with about 70 c&a, 20 yf and 2 e; Roger and Anna Marsh.
- 25 Adore God for the gift of the Son and eternal life in Him; pray that many will be changed by the gospel at this season.
- 26 Byron Bay-Mullumbimby-Bangalow par. NSW with about 145 c&a, 55 yf and 16e; Keith and Melissa Boulden, Jonathan and Anita Woods, Jon and Ruth Nuttall.
- 27 Family missions around Australia over the holidays, particularly any involving members of your church.
- 28 Ingleburn h. m. stn Sydney with about 25 c&a and 5 e; Jan Frost.
- 29 Sandy *mission partners* (APWM) worker from Epping, Sydney in East Asia as an English teacher with OMF.
- 30 Presbytery of Wide Bay-Sunshine Coast, Qld: 6 parishes and 2 home mission stations totaling 11 congregations with about 760 c&a and 105 yf, 6 retired ministers and 1 under jurisdiction. John Tucker clerk.
- 31 Dromana-Mornington par. Melbourne with about 65 c&a, 25 yf and 8 e; Michael and Jennifer Wishart.

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## Books

## A Scottish Christian Heritage

Iain H. Murray

Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2006.

*Reviewed by Greg Goswell.*

Once more we are in debt to Iain Murray for a superb historical survey. He does not set out to write a comprehensive church history of Scotland but takes his readers through four centuries, providing selective biographies and addressing certain issues. Most chapters end with “lessons” or “observations”.

The book opens with the “battle” of the Reformation in Scotland fought by John Knox. This was no mere difference of religious opinion among bigoted men. Murray contributes to the rehabilitation of the maligned reputation of Knox as a Christian and as a reformer. He was “the light of Scotland” and “the mirror of godliness”. Robert Bruce served in the generation that followed that of Knox and exemplified faithfulness in discouraging times (so much like our own), when there was a spiritually-indifferent populace and many in the ministry who were unfaithful. Murray writes to awake memory of Thomas Chalmers, who now largely lies forgotten, drawing lessons on the reviving of the church.

We are told the story of John MacDonald who preached over 10,000 sermons (mostly in the Highlands) all full of God’s love for sinners. We discover the man behind the hymns of Horatius Bonar. The (today!) lesser-known father-in-law of David Livingstone, Robert Moffat, shows the power of gospel preaching to convert uncivilised races (who do not need the “benefits” of civilisation before they can respond).

Murray addresses a neglected (in Scottish theology) aspect of the doctrine of the church, namely the basis of Christian unity, that is not organisational but on the basis of common faith and spiritual life. Scottish preaching has been accused (not without some justification) of being wearisome, but Murray shows how to avoid that pitfall.

The “problem of the elders” is whether two sub-categories, ruling and teaching, are to be recognised on the basis of 1 Timothy 5:17. The tragedy of the Free Church in late 19th century with its galaxy of theological stars teaching in its college, was that they became infected with German critical thought. This shows the danger of the worship of the intellect and of the false apologetic that accommodates Christian teaching to the spirit of the age.

This fine historical study (with lessons) by Iain Murray is a must-read.

*Greg Goswell lectures at the PTC, Melbourne.*

## Short Steps for Long Gains

Simon and Kathy Manchester

Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2006.

*Reviewed by Peter Barnes.*

The Manchesters cite D. L. Moody who came home from a mission one night and reported that there had been two full converts and two halves. When asked if he meant two adults and two children, he replied: “No, two with their whole life ahead of them and two with their life half over.” The point is, as the book of Ecclesiastes says, we need to remember our Creator in the days of our youth. Accordingly, Simon and Kathy have produced a little booklet of 26 topics – arranged alphabetically, and with about seven questions for each topic – to help children know Christ in a saving way. Often such efforts are somewhat banal, but this booklet is satisfying and worthy to be put to good use. It is heartily recommended for Christian families, and it could also prove helpful to Scripture teachers and Sunday School teachers who are looking for material to give to their students.

*Peter Barnes is books editor of AP.*

## Can We Know God?

Maurice Roberts

Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2006.

*Reviewed by Peter Barnes.*

This 32-page evangelistic booklet is designed to creep up on the reader, taking him one step at a time to lead him to face eternal realities. There are no citations of

Scripture until page 24. However, it cannot be said that Maurice Roberts holds anything back that the reader needs to know.

Some might think that the assurance based on evidences of our sanctification is perhaps too strongly worded. Maurice writes that “God’s children continue in these things to the end of their lives”. That is true, and is only saying what John says in his first epistle, and stated as baldly as this might cast doubt on the salvation of Solomon, for example. Also, Maurice believes in degrees of glory – as do I – but Eryl Davies is one who does not. Still, one cannot deal with every issue in 32 pages.

This booklet is designed not as a contribution to systematic theology, but as an evangelistic tool, and it is admirably suited for that purpose. I have people in mind that I could give it to, and am sure that it is just the sort of work that the Lord could bless to their salvation.

## Christianity: The Complete Guide

John Bowden

Continuum, 2005.

*Reviewed by Stuart Bonnington.*

This is a massive work, a one-volume introduction to the Christian faith written largely from what could be called the liberal, Roman Catholic and ecumenical point of view.

Provided the reader is aware of these pre-commitments, the book makes for some very interesting reading for the evangelical reader, offering an often very different take on a wide range of subjects. The vast bulk of the book is made up of 355 major articles, which are interconnected and supplied often with suggestion for further reading and relevant web sites. There are also 166 boxes containing specific information on individual topics.

The book is beautifully produced, has some great illustration, a Who’s Who, time chart, glossary and an index. *The Complete Guide* contains a mixture of history/ theology/ethics. The careful reader will learn a lot from this book, even when having to fundamentally disagree with the views that are being set forth, for it is a masterpiece of critical scholarship.

*Stuart Bonnington is minister of Scot’s Kirk, Fremantle.*

# Prevailing prayer

*George Müller's example provides five principles.*

Recently, I came across George Müller's five conditions of prevailing prayer. If ever a man knew about prayer, it was Müller, the founder of five orphanages in Bristol in the 19th century. After meditating on Psalm 65 ("O Thou that hearest prayer"), Müller got into the habit of writing down definite prayer petitions.

Towards the end of his life, he calculated that he had read the Bible through nearly 200 times, and could find distinct answers to definite prayers in some 50,000 episodes in his life!

Here are his five conditions for prevailing prayer:

1. An entire dependence on Christ as mediator. Whatever we ask the Father is to be done in the name of Jesus Christ, His eternal Son (John 14:13-14; 15:16). When Daniel was in exile in Babylon, he would pray to God three times a day. He did this with his windows open towards Jerusalem (Dan. 6:10). It was at Jerusalem that the temple had been built and where the sacrifices for sin were offered. Whenever a Muslim prays, he prays facing Mecca. The pilgrimage to Mecca is one of the five pillars of Islam. At Mecca, Muslims remember the near-sacrifice of Abraham's son, and conduct animal sacrifices in the belief that the Kaaba is directly under Allah's throne.

To the Christian, there is no holy place that can mediate our prayers. Instead, we come to the Father in the name of the Son. We are acceptable to the Father only because the Son has made us acceptable. He has given His life as a ransom for many, and so has clothed His people with righteousness. God hears us through the mediatorship of His Son, and only through His Son. Without Christ, we cannot expect to pray to God and our prayers to be heard.

2. Separation from all known sin. The Psalmist knew that if he cherished iniquity in his heart, the Lord would not listen to him (Ps. 66:18). We can ask and not receive, because we ask wrongly, being driven by our passions (James 4:3). Noah in his drunken state, David in his adultery, and Peter in his denial of Christ can only repent and pray for forgiveness. While sin



**Peter Barnes**

lords itself over our lives, we cannot pray with any reality. The first prayer of the Christian has to be "Lord, be merciful to me, the sinner".

3. Faith in the promises of God. To draw near to God, we have to believe that He is, and that He rewards those who seek Him (Heb. 11:6). God reassures us

*That is a wonderful promise, but it is not a blank cheque given into the hands of selfish sinners.*

that it is impossible for Him to lie; indeed, He even puts Himself on oath for our sakes! (Heb. 6:13-20). Therefore, we are to believe what He says in His Word. We are to believe Him when He says that 'if we confess


our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:9).

When He refuses to remove a thorn in the flesh of our lives, it is for good and necessary spiritual reasons (2 Cor. 12:1-10). If we trust the promises of human beings – even advertisers and politicians, to some extent – we have far, far, far more reason to trust the promises of God whose very nature is truth, and who delights to fulfil His Word.

4. Asking according to His will. I once listened to the testimony of a Pentecostal girl who told a primary school gathering that "If you want a red Ferrari, God wants you to have a red Ferrari." I am not sure what Bible she was reading, but the apostle John says: "And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us" (1 John 5:14). That is a wonderful promise, but it is not a blank cheque given into the hands of selfish sinners. God blesses His children, which is not to say that He spoils them.

5. Importunity in supplication. Jesus told the parable of the importunate widow badgering the unjust judge to encourage us to keep on praying, and not to lose heart (Luke 18:1-8). We are to be patient, just as the farmer is patient in waiting for his crops to grow (James 5:7). If we are serious about something, we will persevere in it. Anybody who quickly gives up on a project was not committed to it in the first place. The skater who sells his skates after falling over a few times obviously does not have the heart – or the balance, perhaps – for skating.

Müller considered that where these conditions were not met, God would dishonour Himself by answering our prayers, and would do spiritual damage to the supplicant. Prayer is by no means an easy activity, like talking on the telephone or reading a newspaper. These are crucial principles to grasp in order to prevail in prayer.

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



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