

the presbyterian banner

August 2016



*He has made everything beautiful in its time.
He has also set eternity in the hearts of men;
yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.
Ecclesiastes 3:11*

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ISSN 0729-3542

Editorial

Our Men’s Study Breakfast has recently commenced a study on the denominational ‘*Handbook Of Practice And Procedure*’. This might strike some as rather unusual. Why would we spend time that usually would be taken up with spiritual matters with what is simply a practical detail? The ‘Handbook’ is just an operating manual, much like you might have for a microwave or a fridge, isn’t it?

Indeed, in some Christian circles the adherence we have to our rules and regulations is greatly frowned upon. It is said to be quenching the work of the Spirit. In one church assembly one minister even proudly said that he was guided by the spirit of the rules and not by the rules themselves.

Another minister had the appropriate reply to that, though. He said, “The Spirit guides me through the rules we have.” And how true that is! The rules we have don’t come out of a vacuum. They have been carefully considered over centuries. And they always come back to a biblical basis.

In this regard, I like the way the Reformed Churches begin their equivalent of

our ‘Handbook’, which they call a ‘Church Order’. In the ‘Introduction’ at the beginning they state, “In accordance with the apostolic injunction (1 Cor.14:40) that in the Church of Christ all things are to be done decently and in order, the Reformed Churches of ..., in this CHURCH ORDER, regulate their organisation and activities, so that they may fulfil their calling according to the Scriptures and the Reformed Confessions.



Church Order commentaries from Scotland, the Netherlands, the United States, New Zealand, and Australia

It is no surprise, then, that, when you study the way the Handbook is set out, it is based on what the Bible directs us. The Apostle Paul’s first letter to Timothy is a primitive Church Order outlining in brief the Church’s Offices, Assemblies, Task, and Discipline. It is easy to be caught out in a discussion with Christians from a different background with the charge that we are rather tradition-bound. True, there is some tradition that is not biblical. The Roman Catholic Church gives us many examples of this. But there is tradition that must be retained and passed on because it is scriptural. Indeed, to lose that is to end up as many of the churches that those ‘spiritually-minded’ believers are from have come to in our day.

In 2nd Thessalonians 2:15 Paul speaks about holding on to the traditions passed on down to us, and this is what we do when we value the heritage we have. And how much hasn’t it guided us as to how we are to conduct the affairs of the church?

“The words of the prophets are in agreement with this...”
Acts 15:15

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Subscriptions for 2016
11 Issues per year
Within Australia: \$40 [Bulk \$35]
Overseas: AU \$50 Airmail.

Direct Credit :
NAB (BSB) 083-802
A/C No. 98 473 8955

The Presbyterian Banner is the official magazine of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. The PCEA was established in 1846 and adheres to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) as its doctrinal standard. Literary contributions are welcome. Submission by email is preferred. The opinions expressed in signed articles are those of the authors - not necessarily of the editor or the PCEA and may not be reproduced without permission. Articles written by the Editor may be reproduced without asking for permission, although with appropriate acknowledgement. This magazine is available as a pdf file on the Church Website: www.pcea.org.au

“They Have Greatly Oppressed Me”

Psalm 129

Psalm 129 contrasts with Psalm 128 – from happy home to dangerous world. Psalm 129 compares with Psalm 124. Both speak of sore affliction and wonderful deliverance. Both begin with words which are repeated in the first two verses. In both the song leader uses the familiar exhortation, ‘let Israel now say.’ In this psalm Israel is exhorted to remember her past afflictions and suffering; and to recall God’s faithfulness and righteousness (4a). Bearing in mind that these songs were sung by the pilgrims going up to Jerusalem (to commemorate the Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles) these were appropriate themes. The psalm falls into two sections. In verses 1-4 the verbs are all in the past tense. In verses 5-8 the verbs are all in the future tense; thus the psalmist first looks back – and then looks forward. We will see that he is able to look forward with courage and confidence because of what the Lord has done in the past.

1. Looking Back over Israel’s Past – a Story of Suffering and Persecution (1-3)

Derek Kidner makes an arresting comment. He says, ‘*Most nations tend to look back on what they have achieved. Israel reflects on what she has survived*’. The story of Israel as a nation (and the church) is one of remarkable survival, despite constant and persistent attack and opposition.

In verse 1 Israel is personified and speaks; ‘They have greatly oppressed me from my youth’. The psalmist looks back over the long history of Israel; starting in Egypt when she was a youth. Hosea uses the same imagery in Hos. 11: 1. ‘When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son’. The Lord says of Israel,

A Song of Ascents

‘Israel is my first born son’ (Ex. 4: 22). Egypt was in many ways the birth of the nation of Israel. She was thus born in affliction and suffering. She suffered bondage for 430 years in Egypt – under the ruthless rule of the Pharaoh’s – even suffering genocide (Ex. 1: 8-14). Then there were the hardships in the wilderness; the battles in the Promised Land; oppression in the days of the Judges; the Philistine wars and so on. Perhaps there was peace in David and Solomon’s days? But no. Their suffering continued without

Psalm 129

A Song of Ascents

¹ *“Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth,”*

Let Israel now say—

² *“Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth;*

Yet they have not prevailed against me.

³ *The plowers plowed on my back; They made their furrows long.”*

⁴ *The Lord is righteous;*

He has cut in pieces the cords of the wicked.

⁵ *Let all those who hate Zion*

Be put to shame and turned back.

⁶ *Let them be as the grass on the housetops,*

Which withers before it grows up,

⁷ *With which the reaper does not fill his hand,*

Nor he who binds sheaves, his arms.

⁸ *Neither let those who pass by them say,*

“The blessing of the Lord be upon you; We bless you in the name of the Lord!”

respite until the northern kingdom (Israel) was swallowed up by Assyria, and the southern kingdom (Judah) was taken exile to Babylon. Thereafter she never regained independence even after their return from exile. This psalm was probably written around this

George D. Ball

time - after the return from Babylon. The psalmist therefore recounts that all that they had ever known in their history was suffering and persecution.

He uses a vivid metaphor in verse 3. ‘Ploughmen have ploughed my back and made their furrows long’. It’s a picture of horrific cruelty, humiliation, pain and subjection. The deep wounds of the past were still a painful memory.

As Christians we can extend the application of this psalm.

There was one who voluntarily gave His back to the smiters.

Jesus experience was uncannily similar to verse 3. In Isaiah 50: 6 it was prophesied of (Jesus) the Suffering Servant, ‘I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard,’ and in Isaiah 53: 5, ‘He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed’. Matthew interprets Jesus departure as a boy from Egypt in Matt. 2: 15 as a fulfilment of Hosea 11: 1. Thus Jesus life began in suffering and opposition; and ended the same way. Yet ironically, it is because of His ploughed and beaten back that we have forgiveness of our sins and peace with God.

Can we not extend the psalm a little further? Consider the experience of the early Christians in the book of Acts. Well did Paul say of the road that leads from conversion to glory that, ‘we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God’ (Acts 14: 22). And Peter says, ‘Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering . . . For it is time for judgement to begin with the family of God’ (1

Peter 4: 12 and 17). Persecution of Christians has continued throughout the centuries until the present. The New Testament church can also say, 'they have greatly oppressed me from my youth'. It's been a story of suffering and persecution. It's sometimes said that God had only one Son without sin, but none without suffering. So true! If you want further evidence read Foxe's Book of Martyrs; get updates from Barnabas Fund and Open Doors.

2. Looking Back over Israel's Past – a Story of Remarkable Survival (2b and 4)

Yet surprisingly the psalmist is able to say, 'they have not gained the victory over me' (2b).

The enemy has not been able to prevail or defeat the Lord's servants.

Why? It is because, 'the Lord is righteous'. He is true to His covenant (4). He is on the side of His people. He is against the wicked. Paul asks, 'If God be for us who can be against us?' His people are the apple of His eye. Meddle with His people, and you meddle with the Lord. Remember how the Lord challenged Saul on the road to Damascus; 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'

Further, the psalmist testifies 'He has cut me free from the cords of the wicked' (4). He brings release at just the right time; just as the burden is removed from the back of the beast at the right time; just as the plough is unhitched from the ox at the right time; just as the prisoner is set free at the right time. So the Lord has set His people free. Motyer comments, '*Somehow or other there is a superior power resident in the Lord's people*'. As the trials of the Lord's people have been great, so the deliverances have been equally great. One only has to think of the exodus from Egypt; the defeat of the Philistine giant; the return from exile in Babylon; and of course

Christ's death for our sins – at just the right time.

It is because the Lord is on our side that the church has such a long and singular history. The 16th Century French reformer Theodore Beza said to King Henry of Navarre, '*Sir, it is the lot of the church of Christ to endure blows and not to inflict them. But it may please you to remember that the church is an anvil that has worn out many hammers*'. Jesus promised, 'I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'.

3. Looking Forward to Israel's Future with Confidence in the Righteous God (5-8)

In light of such a painful past how does one face the future which is likely to prove just as menacing? Because there will always be those who hate Zion – and the Gospel - for no good reason.

These verses answer that very question. Are they a prayer or an affirmation? Perhaps both. What then should be our attitude toward those who hate Zion? He prays against them, not out of personal malice, but because they are enemies of God.

He prays that they will be defeated (5). 'May all who hate Zion be turned back in shame'. He desires that the Lord will foil their purpose.

He prays that they will be disappointed (6-7). They may have expected a harvest from their effort of ploughing (3). The psalmist prays that they may be like grass on the roof which withers before it can grow; with it the reaper cannot fill his hands (6-7). So may their opposition and hatred prove fruitless and frustrating.

He prays that they will be 'unblessed' (8). If there was no such word, there is now! He says, 'May those who pass by not say, the blessing of the Lord be upon you; we bless you in the name of the Lord' (8). He prays that they will receive no encouragement or

support or recognition.

Perhaps it seems unchristian to pray that anyone should be defeated, destroyed, disappointed and unblessed? It is important to remember however that these imprecatory parts of the psalms are a cry to the Lord for justice; it places the problem of evil in His hands and waits for His judgement. That's one reason (among others) why psalms such as these should still be sung. They demonstrate faith in the Lord within the trauma of real life situations and teach us to express a holy, moral indignation toward those who set themselves against God's King and His kingdom. If we knew a bit more of what persecution means, these judgement psalms would mean more to us.

Spurgeon wrote unapologetically, '*Study a chapter from Foxe's Book of Martyrs and see if you do not feel inclined to read an imprecatory psalm over Bishop Bonner or Bloody Mary. It may be that some wretched 19th century sentimentalist will blame you. If so, then read another one over him!*'

Perhaps the message of the psalm could be summarised in the words of the apostle, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us' (Romans 8: 35-37).

Prayer: *Eternal God, you have always shown great care for your church and your people; assist us with your favour and grace, in such ways that we may overthrow all the schemes of our enemies, that they may be confounded and shamed. May we in confidence glorify your holy name, all the days of our life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord and only Saviour. Amen.*

The Past for Today

Christianity in Scotland (17): Diversity

Rowland S. Ward

The Free Church of Scotland Assembly resolved on official discussions with the United Presbyterians in 1863. However, these collapsed in 1873 on the objection of Free Church conservatives such as Begg in Edinburgh, but particularly Highland ministers and elders. The objectors maintained that the voluntarist views of the United Presbyterians could not be reconciled with the establishment/national recognition principle of the Free Church. Nevertheless, it was clear a large majority wished a union regardless, but was not yet willing to lose the Highland part of the church, which had been so supportive in 1843, in a second disruption. The Free Church contented itself in declaring United Presbyterian ministers were eligible for calls to vacant charges in terms of a Mutual Eligibility Act.

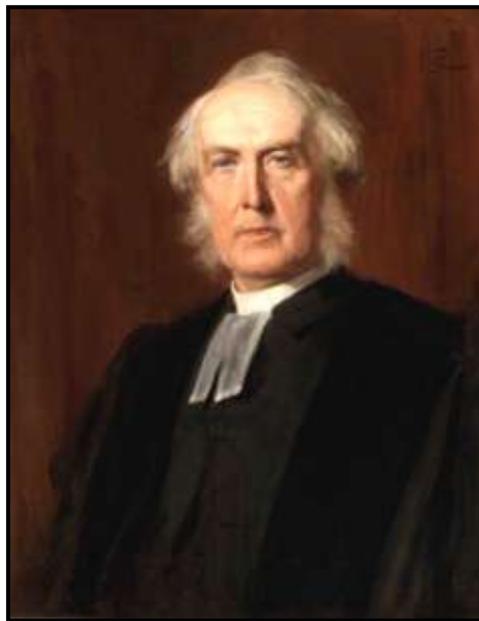
Under Candlish's anointed successor in leadership of the Assembly, Robert Rainy (1826-1906), agitation for dis-establishment of the Church of Scotland was renewed with a vote of 397 to 84 in the Free Church Assembly of 1875. This agitation continued until 1886 when the disestablishment campaign lost traction due to the political situation.

Meantime, other troubles afflicted the churches. As the 19th century advanced the impact of the Romantic movement became more and more evident. Emphasis fell on the individual and the subjective, and this coloured the revival movements at Kilsyth in 1839 on the eve of the Disruption, and the Ulster Revival of 1859 which spilled over into Scotland. The organised Scottish evangelistic campaign of D. L. Moody (1837-99) in 1874 was very influential, particularly in the Free Church and in the mission halls and Baptist churches. It was a more emotional

and less doctrinal faith. In the main people on the fringes of the church were those converted. Attitudes to the severe simplicity of Scottish worship accelerated acceptance of hymns (1851 in the UPC, 1861 in the ECS and 1872 in the FCS) and instrumental music (ECS 1865, UPC 1872, FCS 1883). The older Calvinism was on the way out and the faith was increasingly viewed in individualistic terms, which exactly suited the direction of the culture. Electoral reform in 1868 gave the vote to all male heads of households.

Union and Diversity

The last half of the 19th century raised other intellectual issues that the Scottish churches generally were ill-prepared to face. In 1839 the Church of Scotland Assembly had resolved that all students of divinity were required to have the study of biblical criticism as part of



Rev. Dr. Robert Rainy (1826-1906)

their course. Lower criticism was the study of the transmission of the text and its variant readings; higher criticism was the study of the literary composition and char-

acter of the text, a field where the presuppositions of the critic were particularly crucial. All this is important for those who take the Bible seriously. However, scholars engaged in higher criticism were centred in Germany and included those who applied evolutionary concepts to the development of the Old Testament and the history of Israel, and some who dismissed the miraculous.

In the *Church of Scotland* the Confession of Faith was already viewed in a relaxed way in practice, and there was significant diversity extending even to the absolute idealism, derived from G. W. F. Hegel, of Professor John Caird who taught theology in Glasgow.

In the *United Presbyterian Church* there was also a less strict position. In May 1879 the United Presbyterians passed with virtual unanimity a Declaratory Act which modified subscription to the Confession with qualifying clauses. The Calvinism of the Confession was relaxed and views of the atonement which departed from penal substitution accommodated. It also stated 'liberty of opinion is allowed on such points in the Standards, not entering into the substance of the faith' without defining what matters were of this description.

The *Reformed Presbyterian Church* in the year following the Electoral Reform Act of 1832 held that to exercise the vote was to recognise the British constitution and therefore was inconsistent with the position on non-recognition held by the church and binding on members. As more members became eligible to vote pressure was exerted against this position and the requirement of discipline and ex-

clusion from membership was dropped in 1858. In 1863 when the RP church had 46 congregations and nearly 7,000 communicant members, this position received overwhelming support and a minority thereupon protested and withdrew. The majority also dropped the covenanting position in 1872 and joined the Free Church in 1876.

The minority of 1863 consisting of eight congregations, chiefly in the south and west of Scotland, and augmented by four others who declined the 1876 union, had some 15% of the undivided church but entered

into slow decline to an effective membership of 150 in 1987. Meanwhile, talks with the Free Church in the 1930s and in 1967 did not result in closer relations although there was by the later date no doctrinal difference as confessional subscription by communicant members had been dropped in 1932, the voting requirement in 1960 and closed communion in 1965.¹

The *Free Church* was a strict subscription body and prided herself on the high standard required of her ministry. A number studied in Germany and some adopted views found there

among the higher critics. The question must be asked why the Free Church Fathers did not understand the potential of liberalism and teach students to deal with it more effectively. Self-confidence in her position and attainments seems to be at the root.

Notes:

¹ See G.J.Keddie, 'The Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Disruption of 1863' in *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, Vols. 11.2 & 12.1.

The Moderator's Synod Devotion — 5 May

Our Church looking for the Kingdom

Revelation 4

David Kerridge

In our final devotion this morning, "Our Church looking for the Kingdom", I want us to look at a picture. Not something I'm going to project up on the wall, nor produce from beneath the pulpit here as some sort of visual aid. I want us to look at a picture painted in words in Revelation 4 of the Kingdom of Christ as it truly is.

Paul spoke in 2 Corinthians 3 about the Old Testament dispensation in which the truth was veiled, and then about the unveiling of that truth in the world through the coming of Christ. But even as we have this truth shown us in the Gospel and proclaimed by the Church, we ourselves see not by sight but by faith. We see as in a mirror dimly, but then at the coming of the Lord, face to face in the glorious brightness of His presence.

So let us look at the first scene of John's vision of what it is we, as a Church, are, or should be, looking for – the Kingdom of Christ.

The portrayal of all of this takes place in the Throne Room of the King of Kings after all the

conquest of the earth, after the defeat of Satan, after our sojourn on earth is finished and the Church is no longer the Church militant, struggling in the world but the Church Triumphant. Chapter 4, verse 1:

"After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, 'Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.'"

The Context

John has been writing letters to the churches, dictated to him by the Lord Jesus in Chapters 1 to 3 of Revelation. In these, the Lord has been concerned with what is going on on the Earth, in the witness, or lack thereof, of the Churches to Himself – each of the Angels of the churches is called to account, and either encouraged for their faithfulness, or reprimanded for their transgressions. Now the Lord, with a voice like a trumpet, calls John up to see what must take place after this. Thus in a vision, John

is drawn up by the Spirit of God to see what is at the centre of Heaven, the Throne of God. Verse 2: **"Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne."**

Again, John is in the Spirit, as he was in the first vision of the seven churches on the Lord's Day. Now he is about to receive another important vision from the Holy Spirit and as he watches he makes an exclamation at the glory of the sight. Behold! Look! There he sees a Throne, and a person sitting on that throne! John does not identify who is sitting on the Throne by name. Perhaps the glory of that is too much for him at this first encounter. He rather goes on to give a description of what this One looked like. Verse 3: "And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and *there* was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald."

Jasper is a precious stone with either a red yellow or green colour, probably green in

this case as this was most common in the ancient world. Sardius was a dull red gemstone, also a type of quartz. Why the One on the Throne should look like gemstones in appearance is strange, but the idea is that the sight of this One was dazzling and rich and indescribable in normal language. Another hint we get as to who this person is, is that the stones John mentions are the first and the last in the breastplate of the High Priest in Exodus 28.

We have then One who sits on the throne who is majestic, and indescribable, one who is greater than the High Priest of Israel. We look further at the description of this picture and see that this One is surrounded by a rainbow, John says, that looked like an emerald in appearance. This is a very strange phrase – at first glance it may seem as though John is describing an aura around the throne in shades of emerald green. However, it is better to think of this as a rainbow of many colours, that is brilliant as an emerald, shining and refracting light into its constituent colours.

What does the rainbow represent in the Bible but God's Covenant? The covenant with Noah representing God's mercy to all mankind, the covenant of redemption in Christ Jesus representing God's mercy and grace in the salvation won by the incarnate Lord. Gregory Beale, in his commentary, goes further to envisage that, just as the rainbow appeared at the beginning of the renewed creation after the Flood, so too this rainbow shows forth, in glorious colours, the appearing of a new heavens and a new earth at the final coming of the Lord Jesus.

Pointing To Christ

All the elements of the picture we have, then, point to the one en-

throned being Jesus. One who is glorious in appearance, shining with a brightness that the transfigured Christ had on the mountain during his life. One who is our great High Priest, of an order more majestic than that of Aaron. One who has fulfilled all the requirements of the covenant of grace to bring us salvation. Our Lord and Saviour, Christ Jesus. However, in an almost equivalent picture given in Ezekiel 1, we have a reflections here of God the



The Rev. David Kerridge. Moderator

Father, God enthroned – the Ancient of Days. John uses language to try to describe the scene but it falls short. There is also a reserve about calling the One on the Throne by His name. It is a sketch, glimpses of what is there, patches of light and colour. It is beyond his understanding, and so he uses the language with which he is familiar, drawn from the imagery of the Old Testament with which he is familiar, and the images revealed to him there of the

person of God.

Now this part of our picture is complete: John stands before the Throne of God, there is a person on the Throne who is obviously the Lord Jesus, but there is also the unfathomable person of God the Father. Such a vision is beyond John's language to capture, as it is beyond us to fully understand the Triune God we worship.

Not able to gaze on this sight for long, John turns to describe what is around the Throne of God. Here are more familiar things. Verse 4: **“Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.”**

The throne of God was encircled, or flanked, by twenty-four other thrones, and on these John sees twenty-four Elders sitting. He sees men here, recognisable humanity, and calls them Elders. They are wearing white robes and are crowned with gold and so wear the badges of authority and righteousness. John sees this more easily describable image, away from the inexpressible glory of the Throne of God, but he does not say who these twenty-four Elders are.

The traditional view is that these twenty-four are the 12 patriarchs of the tribes of Israel from the Old Testament and the 12 Apostles from the New. Others think that the Elders are a better order of Priests and Levites who were in charge of the Worship in the Temple, and as the earthly Temple was modelled on the heavenly here are the Heavenly priests in charge of the worship before the Throne of God. Another view still is that these Elders are Angels, as Isaiah 24

calls them, and as Jesus writes to the “Angel” of each Church in the first 3 chapters, so these Angels represent the entire congregation of the faithful, 12 times 12 – a perfect number, glorified and redeemed wearing white garments and crowned with Gold, sitting with their Lord in His righteousness around His Throne. Beale writes: “As in chs. 1–3, the church is pictured in angelic guise to remind its members that already a dimension of their existence is heavenly, that their real home is not with the unbelieving “earth-dwellers,” and that they have heavenly help and protection in their struggle to obtain their reward and not be conformed to their pagan environment.”

The Centrality of the Throne

Here is a more familiar image for John, but he must return to the glorious and wonderful Throne of God. John returns to describing it. Verse 5: **“And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.”**

The Throne is not only a magnificent sight, there are also sounds, and John becomes aware of the voices and lightning and thunder that proceed from the throne. God speaks and His voice is as the voice of many waters, He speaks in a still, small voice, His voice is as the thunder as it says in Job 37 and elsewhere. Lightning accompanying the thunder is part of the powerful display of God’s voice proceeding from the Throne. Now there on the Throne with the One in human like form, the ascended and transfigured Lord Jesus, a voice speaking with the power and authority of God the Father: the God who speaks and all Creation comes into being, the God who speaks His Law and speaks through the prophets, who

speaks “in these last days” through the incarnation of Christ, and who speaks through the proclamation of His word in the Church, is the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

Here, as at the beginning of Revelation, the Holy Spirit is represented as the Seven Spirits of God. As with the seven lamps, this does not mean that there are seven distinct Spirits of God but is rather referring to the perfection of God in the number seven, and also referring to Isaiah 11



which mentions the actions of God through the Holy Spirit in the world.

Again, John doesn’t seem able to gaze at the Throne for long and so looks away again to take in what is around it. Around the Throne of God in verse 6 is a sea of clear glass, like crystal. This is another picture of the majesty of the scene. Glass in ancient times was usually very smoky and never clear because of impurities in it. Clear glass was very rare and hence very expensive. But this Throne of God is surrounded by a sea of glass. A vast expanse. The idea of the pure glass sea is hard to explain but could mean the vastness of the kingdom of God, with him reign-

ing at its centre, a pure righteous kingdom.

The Four Living Creatures

Finally, John sees before the Throne four living creatures. Verse 6 to 8: **“And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. 7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the**

fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. 8 The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying:

**“Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is
to come!”**

Now what these four creatures are or represent: there have been many interpretations, but it is best to think of these as the cherubim – a special class of angel that is close to God and serves him. Cherubim were set to guard the entrance to the garden of Eden. The ark of the covenant was

overshadowed by two cherubim. Psalm 80 and 99 speak of GOD dwelling between the cherubim. The cherubim had wings, as these do, but the faces of the cherubim here, and in Ezekiel 1 are described as having the faces of animals and one with the face of a man. One interpretation is then to think of these cherubim as representing God's power and control over all. They, the angels serve God and obey Him, and they represent in John's vision, God's power over domestic beasts, as the bull calf, over all wild animals represented by the king of beasts the lion, over all birds of the air – the most majestic and mighty being the eagle, and over man, who in turn has been given dominion over creation. We now have a wide vista of all of creation serving and worshipping the Lord God. The whole of Creation in all its power and glory bows down before the Throne of God, continually crying out "HOLY HOLY LORD GOD ALMIGHTY who was and is and is to come." The living creatures representing all creation bow down to worship, and the twenty-four elders representing all the redeemed of the Earth join in worshipping the Lord. Verses 9 to 11: **"Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:**

11 "You are worthy, O Lord,

To receive glory and honor and power;

For You created all things,

And by Your will they exist and were created."

The Biggest Possible Picture

The whole picture is now completed for us. John is taken up into Heaven to see the Throne of God. What he sees is the infinite power and majesty of the Triune God, enthroned in Heaven, surrounded by all that He has made and all the people that belong to his kingdom in all of the history of the earth. But Chapter 4 is only at the beginning of Revelation and it is here and not at the end for a very important reason. What John sees here is a picture of what is yet to come: the absolute and final victory of God in Christ over Satan and all his minions. The Elders representing all of God's people gathered together and bowed down before the Throne worshipping God forever more. All of Creation, Angel, Man and Beast, freed from oppression and groaning under the weight of sin, no longer any weeping or pain – all former things having passed away – all God's people now worshipping God in the beauty of His holiness. But this is only chapter 4, the beginning of John's vision. The great conflict is yet to be seen in coming visions. What John wants us to understand by placing this picture first before our eyes is that God's power is over all, even before this great conflict is fought. Christ has already won the victory and this is a picture of sure and certain future.

Salvation and glory await those who will have to, for a short time, face suffering. This was the theme of all the letters to the Churches in chapters 1 to 3. This is the point of this picture here in chapter 4. Satan's Kingdom and power are thrown down already by the ascended and triumphant Lord Jesus, who has accomplished the work given to Him by the Father on the Cross. The Throne of God that was from all eternity past is established

and sure for all eternity future.

The Churches in Asia Minor were seeing the opposite in their time. The Throne of Satan was being set up in every temple devoted to Caesar in their town. Christians were dying, persecuted and suffering for owning the name of Christ. A spiritual struggle was going on all around them that was far worse than the pathetic efforts of modern day secularists to limit the influence of the church. The whole creation, Paul said in Romans, was groaning under the weight of sin and death, longing for a better time, for redemption for the realisation of John's vision. What the people of the churches of Asia Minor had to know was that God's Throne was never threatened and that His power would soon defeat evil and bring them victory.

For us, the picture that we see through John's vision must also bring us hope. When we face trial and suffering and spiritual struggle, when we see only small numbers and diminishing congregations, we must look to this passage and see the untainted, unmarked, unchanging, glory and power of GOD and his rule and control over all things. We belong to the Kingdom of Christ Jesus in this world, and the world is getting worse, but we must always keep our focus on the picture that we have here. We have to be looking constantly for the Kingdom whose builder and maker is God. He is the one who keeps us: he is our defence and shield and our exceedingly great reward. John has seen a vision of what is to come, we have to be patient and persevere and wait for it to be revealed. Even so come, Lord Jesus.

The World in the Banner

Jesus's wife' papyrus is likely a fake, Harvard professor now says

A Harvard professor who caused a huge splash when she unveiled a small fragment of papyrus that she said referred to Jesus being married now says it's likely a forgery. Harvard Divinity School professor Karen King presented the piece of papyrus in Rome in 2012. The fragment, written in Coptic, includes the phrase, "Jesus said to them, My wife."

Right from the beginning, it sparked controversy and debate among scholars. Doubts about its authenticity were raised almost immediately. King said it is more likely than not that the fragment is a modern forgery. She cited an investigative article published last week on the website of *The Atlantic* magazine that raised questions about the owner of papyrus, Florida businessman Walter Fritz.

The Atlantic also was the first to report her concession that the papyrus is likely a fake. "If you ask me today which direction am I leaning more toward — ancient text or a modern forgery — based on this new evidence, I'm leaning toward modern forgery," King told *The Associated Press*.

The Atlantic found inconsistencies in Fritz's story about how he came to acquire the papyrus and in a document he gave to King purporting to authenticate it. "This evidence does make a difference in judging whether it was a forgery or not, and it pushes the evidence toward it being a forgery," King said.

A valid telephone number could not be found for Fritz. In an email sent to the AP on Monday, Fritz included a letter he sent to *The Atlantic* in which he denied forging, altering or manipulating the papyrus or its inscription.

Mark Goodacre, a professor of religious studies at Duke University, said doubts about the frag-

ment were raised within hours of King showing the text at a conference in Rome. "When you show something like that to people who spend their entire lives starting at these things, a lot of them could straightaway tell there was something fishy about it," Goodacre said. He said he credits King with having "a lot of guts" to acknowledge that she was likely duped. King said she has always maintained that the fragment wasn't evidence about whether Jesus was married.

"It's at most a part of the early Christian story about should Christians marry, and so on and so forth," she said. She said she is "not happy" about being lied to, but felt "oddly relieved" after reading *The Atlantic* article. "I think having the truth is always kind of centering," she said.

David Hempton, dean of Harvard Divinity School, said in a statement that its mission is to "pursue truth through scholarship, investigation and vigorous debate." The school is "grateful to the many scholars, scientists, technicians and journalists who have devoted their expertise to understanding the background and meaning of the papyrus fragment," Hempton said.

+ www.boston.com/news/national-news/2016/06/20/jesus-wife-papyrus-is-likely-a-fake-harvard-professor-now-says

Vic euthanasia recommendation at odds with report's emphasis on care

The Victorian Parliament should reject a parliamentary committee recommendation to allow euthanasia because well-intentioned safeguards in other countries have been found not to protect people who are vulnerable to being pressured into dying.

The warning from the Australian Christian Lobby, came as the Legal and Social Issues Committee

today handed down its recommendations which included "that the Victorian Government introduce a legal framework providing for assisted dying."

ACL Victorian Director Dan Flynn said the committee was misguided to suggest it was possible to introduce 'safe' euthanasia legislation. "There are so many examples around the world which show that providing the ability to suicide puts undue pressure on vulnerable people such as those with disabilities, the very young or older citizens," Mr Flynn said.

"Even the legislation in Oregon, USA, held up by pro-euthanasia groups as a model framework, has pitfalls that will that the Victorian Parliament should not ignore. The Oregon law requires that patients be referred for psychological examination if the doctor suspects they have depression or mental illness, in order to protect those going through a period of mental illness from falling into the trap of assisted suicide. Yet in Oregon only five of the 132 individuals who died by assisted suicide in 2015 were referred for psychiatric evaluation to ensure that was not their motivation. More than 50 per cent of those who are assisted to suicide in Oregon speak of their concern of being a burden to family and friends." Mr Flynn said the ACL and its supporters understood and supported the aim of making end of life as comfortable as possible for those suffering pain. "While ACL understands and shares the desire to see people relieved of their pain, this can be better achieved by taking advantage of the tremendous medical advances in palliative care," Mr Flynn said. "Palliative care is a more prudent and ethical way of ensuring a dignified death than public policy which is open to

abuse and which unwittingly or wittingly puts pressure on the ill and vulnerable to end their lives. The ACL supports the report in so far as it calls for greater attention on the provision of palliative care but believes the report oversteps the mark by advancing the idea that it is possible to liberalise euthanasia law without putting pressure to die on the vulnerable.

"The inclusion of a recommendation for euthanasia and assisted suicide is completely at odds with the rest of the report and appears inconsistent with the report's thrust to provide the best care possible. As we see in places such as Oregon, legalising assisted suicide radically alters social norms and gives societal approval, if not encouragement, to suicide. The ACL will be working closely with Parliamentarians to ensure that they are informed of the consequences of introducing any euthanasia laws which have a track record of failing individuals and the community."
+ ACL Media June 9, 2016

Child Poverty: Don't Mention Family Structure

A report just released on child poverty and its causes argues that the 'elephant in the room' in the debate is family structure which is being constantly ignored, but that it is contributing significantly to increasing income inequality and child poverty and must be confronted. The report by prominent welfare commentator and researcher Lindsay Mitchell entitled "*CHILD POVERTY & FAMILY STRUCTURE: What is the evidence telling us?*" examines household incomes and family structure from the early 1960s through to current day, and says that while unemployment, low wages, high housing costs and insufficient social security benefits are consistently blamed for child poverty, a major culprit - if not the major culprit - is family malformation, that is, a lack of two

married committed parents. Evidence produced in the report highlights:

-Despite families being much smaller, parents being older, mothers being better educated and having much higher employment rates, child poverty has risen significantly since the 1960s.

-In 1961, 95 percent of children were born to married couples; by 2015 the proportion had fallen to 53 percent. For Maori, 72 percent of births were to married parents in 1968; by 2015 the proportion had fallen to just 21 percent.

-In 2015, 27 percent of registered births were to cohabiting parents. But the risk of parental separation by the time the child is aged five is, however, 4-6 times greater than for married parents.

-Single parent families make up 28 percent of all families with dependent children. These families are the poorest in New Zealand.

**-51% of children in poverty live in single parent families.
-Single parents have the lowest home ownership rates and the highest debt ratios.**

The research paper, commissioned by Family First NZ, draws the conclusion that NZ's rapidly changing family structure has contributed significantly to increasing income inequality.

"Despite marriage being the best protector against child poverty, it has become politically unfashionable – some argue insensitive – to express such a view. But reducing child poverty rates will require encompassing analysis and debate," says the author Lindsay Mitchell.

The author argues that the evidence supporting her premise is 'overwhelming and incontrovertible'.

+ Family First NZ Media Release, 30 May 2016



Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia
FAMILY CAMP
at
*Elanora Conference Centre,
Elanora Heights, NSW*
5 pm Tuesday 3rd January 2017 to
1 pm Friday 6th January 2017 (DV)
Main Speaker: To be advised

*Enjoy Fellowship with other Christian families
Be seriously challenged in your thinking and lifestyle
Afternoons free to relax – games, bushwalks and pool
Missions night Psalmody Good food Peaceful surrounds Childrens
programme*

*Brochures with further details available soon
Please pray for God's help and blessing
(Youth & Fellowship Committee)*

Children under the Banner — Luke 15:1-7



Prescribed Search Work

AUGUST 2016

Senior Section 12 years and over; Intermediate 10—11 years; Junior 9 years and under

SENIOR AND INTERMEDIATE (Intermediate omit questions 2 and 8)

1 PETER chapter 1

1. Why is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ to be blessed? (3 verses)
- x2. Why are we to pass the time of our sojourning here in fear? (3 verses only)
3. What is the contrast between the glory of man and the word of God? (2 verses)

chapter 2

4. To what class of people is the chief corner stone precious? What is he to those who are disobedient? (2 verses)
5. What are our respective duties to all men [people], the brotherhood, God and the king?
6. What example did Christ leave us when he suffered for us? (3 verses)

chapter 3

7. How are women to adorn themselves? (2 verses)
- x8. How are we to act if we suffer for righteousness' sake? (2 verses)

JUNIOR

1 KINGS chapter 18:17—40

1. Name the people that Elijah commanded Ahab to gather on Mount Carmel.
2. What happened when the prophets of Baal called, "O Baal, Hear us"?
3. What was Elijah's prayer at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice? (2 verses)
4. What did the people do when they saw the fire of the Lord fall on the altar?

Please send the answers to:
Mrs I Steel
PO Box 942
Epping NSW 1710
The questions for the whole year
are available from the above postal
address or by email at:
iesteel@gmail.com

Books in the Banner

The Real John Knox

Review of *John Knox* by Jane Dawson

If you ever go to see the John Knox statue at St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh, you won't come away with warm and fuzzy feelings. Knox, in statue and in Scottish historical memory, comes off as stern, formidable, and unapproachable. To admirers, he was also a man of deep principle and driven conviction. But still, our conventional Knox can seem hard and cold.

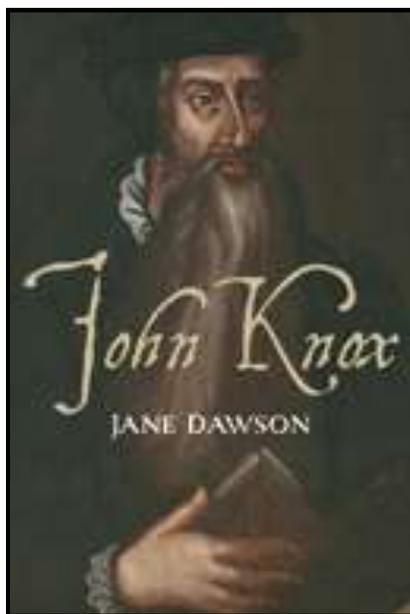
What a pleasure, then, to read Jane Dawson's recent biography, simply titled *John Knox*, where we meet Knox the man. His life was a remarkable one by any account. He was the key figure not only in the Scottish Reformation, but also a major player in the Reformation in England and on the Continent. But Dawson introduces us to Knox as a family man, a Christian brother, and a believer struggling (as do we all) to remain faithful to the Lord.

Dawson opens the book with an illustrative story of the 1557 baptism of Knox's son in Geneva. Knox is cradling the newborn in his arms and weeping, as he was a man "to whom tears came easily." The minister, Christopher Goodman, was Knox's long-time closest friend. Goodman and Knox had been involved in writing the baptismal liturgy which Goodman now performed. Although his wife Marjorie was not at the service (birth mothers typically did not attend baptisms), his relationship with her was tender, and he depended heavily on friendships with a number of Reformed female associates.

As Dawson suggests, this picture of close relationships and warm personality contrasts with the stereotypical image of Knox as an arch-Puritan and a woman-hater. The latter characterization has been tied to Knox's ill-considered tract *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, which denounced women rulers and earned him perpetual

enmity from Queen Elizabeth I, among others.

Aside from his strong day-to-day relationships with female relatives and friends, the bond that stands out most in Dawson's portrait is that between Christopher Goodman and Knox. It is tough for any biographer to find new material about someone so well-known as Knox, but Dawson uses newly-discovered letters in Goodman's papers that illuminate previously unknown aspects of Knox's career, and his edifying friendship with Goodman.



The statuary image of Knox is of a prophet set apart. Of course, we have known about his relationship with Calvin and other leading Reformers. But like Luther, in our mind's eye Knox seems like a man willing to stand alone. All this is true, but I was struck by how his friendship with Goodman and others undergirded all of Knox's work. Goodman is little known today, but one could argue that he was just as important to the Reformation as Knox. If nothing else, Knox would likely tell us that he would not have had the career he did without Goodman. The only surviving image of Knox during his lifetime is a

woodcut of the two-man team blowing their prophetic trumpets.

This is a good reminder to pastors and all believers laboring in the church today. The Lone Ranger model of the great Reformer is a myth. (Even the Lone Ranger had Tonto, after all.) Knox spoke regularly of the "comfort" he received from Goodman's steadfast presence and counsel. Goodman changed Knox's mind on some critical issues, such as the controversy over ministers wearing traditional vestments.

Sometimes today we speak of brothers and sisters "walking together" in the Lord. But Knox and Goodman literally walked together for miles on end, sorting out pastoral, political, and theological challenges as they strolled along. Our hyper-sexualized culture would probably misread the deep devotion Knox and Goodman had for each other, as Knox once testified that he thirsted for Goodman's presence more than his own wife. (Dawson, thankfully, interprets such statements correctly as reflecting how dependent Knox was on their friendship.) The church today struggles to sustain and define male companionship, but Knox and Goodman knew what it meant for Christian men to be brothers side-by-side in spiritual battle together.

I also found it strangely comforting to see how often Knox struggled with doubt, desperation, and what Dawson calls "depression." (I think she means this in a non-clinical sense, although at times she does imply that Knox became nearly suicidal.) Figures like Jonathan Edwards spoke of similar emotional struggles. We sometimes imagine that the great heroes of the faith must not have struggled like we do. But I believe instead that they consistently obeyed in spite of,

not in the absence of, their struggles.

In 1566, Knox wrote in the midst of one of the darkest stretches of the fight for Scotland's Reformation that, even after decades in the cause, he still found nothing in himself but "vanity and corruption. For, in quietness I am negligent, in trouble impatient, tending to desperation, and in the mean state, I am so carried away with vain fantasies, that (alas) O Lord, they withdraw me from the presence of thy Maj-

esty." This was Calvinist theology personalized, in ways with which we can all identify. As much as we might advance in sanctification in this life, we should still find no reason for spiritual pride, or imagine that we have somehow "made it" in our journey to holiness.

I heartily recommend Dawson's biography for its thorough, realistic, and (generally) sympathetic portrait of Knox as a real person. He wept, struggled, and sensed his deep need for vital relationships with his

brothers and sisters. And as he did these things, God turned him into one of the great pillars of the faith. (Published by Yale University Press, 2015)

*Thomas S. Kidd is distinguished professor of history at Baylor University, and the author of books including *George Whitefield: America's Spiritual Founding Father*. This was first published on www.Reformation21.org*

Film in the Banner

To boldly go ... nowhere at all

Andrew Wibe Bajema

When hearing that the terrific action director Justin Lin (*Fast and Furious 3-6*) was taking the reins of the newest *Star Trek Beyond* (2016), the prospect of hopping onto the Starship Enterprise was extremely enticing. Unfortunately with recent events, the film feels as alienating as being a Klingon.

In a publicity stunt and odd homage, the writers decided to force the character Sulu (John Cho) out of the closest, in reference to the former Sulu actor George Takei being an open homosexual. Takei himself did not see the purpose of making Sulu homosexual just for the sake of him, and openly stated his dismay at the decision because it completely disrespected the original work of Gene Roddenberry, who created *Star Trek*. Not even George Takei's minority and LGBT status was able to protect him from the onslaught of liberal panderers. Producer JJ Abrams (also director of the new *Star Wars*) states that Takei is behind the curve and brings too much past "baggage." The attack on Takei is another example of the progressive left (or 'regressive' as it's affectionately called), assassinating its own that begin to doubt their core premise. Unsurprisingly, Takei quickly towed back into the party line and apologised for his criticism.

But Takei's criticism is spot on, and really goes to the heart of how

media is used in service of pushing progressive doctrine, instead of being about what it should be about... good cinema. Media has always been involved with the switching of minor elements to keep well known series fresh enough for the viewer to be seen again. Yet increasingly it has been taking on a much more ideological and political agenda.

A most blatant example of this is with the newest *Ghostbusters*



For Takei it's OK to be gay, just don't have an opinion.

(2016) film; there, instead of aiming to get the most suitable actors, whether male or female, the creators went for a type of edgy affirmative-action and purposely used an all female team. With the release of its trailer, hoards of fans criticised its style and tone, not so much its female cast. Like *Star Trek Beyond*, the publicity machine went into overdrive, claiming that any male

who disliked the new *Ghostbusters* was just a massive sexist and if you're for female equality you need to watch this film.

Neither of these recent stunts contributes to the story or the quality of film at all, and Hollywood's continual agenda push becomes an excuse to distract from the decline of quality in many of its films. When the goal is novelty for the sake of novelty, it ceases to be about the love of cinema, literature, or any art. The same may be seen in many mainline Churches, where the self-gratifying nature of the social justice agenda tends to overtake the quality of preaching and teaching of the Scriptures. And just like with the movies, this new dogma often just results in alienating the target audience so that more and more people will end up voting with their feet.

Does there need to be a homosexual character or a forced empowered woman to improve any story? Of course not. There are those telling us that apparently all stories, whether something as recent as *Star Trek* or as old as Shakespeare, must change in order to fit the newest moralistic hobby-horses of the warped Western-secular mindset. Whether in worship or in the world, we need to be constantly aware of this ideological rot.

Churches in the Banner

Northern Rivers

On Friday, 20th May, Rev. David Kerridge was inducted as the Minister of Northern Rivers congregation. Rev. Trevor Leggott, from Central Presbytery was associated with the Northern Presbytery, and Rev Jim Klazinga, as Moderator, conducted Public worship reading from John chapter 5.

Once Rev Kerridge signed the

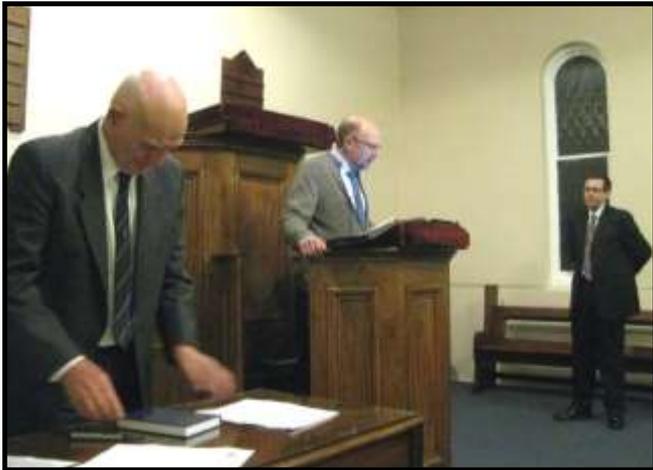
formula he was inducted into the charge with prayer and extended the right hand of fellowship by the brethren present.

The Moderator then addressed the newly inducted minister in appropriate terms and Dr. Hanna addressed the congregation.

All then gathered in the hall where greetings from other members and congregations were

read, also those from other churches in Maclean were able to meet and welcome the Kerridge family.

After presentations to David and Mandy, and also for Wes and Eleanor for acting as our Interim Moderator during the vacancy, all enjoyed the supper presented by our ladies.



Photos: Scenes from the Induction Service and Fellowship in the Hall afterwards

