

the presbyterian banner

October 2016

*“Flowers appear on the earth;
the season of singing has come,
the cooing of doves is heard
in our land.”*

Song of Songs 2:12

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Editorial

Well, it finally happened a few weeks ago. After seven years under the new format of Millionaire Hot Seat, the program actually produced a millionaire! And it couldn't have happened to a nicer man. At least by Eddie McGuire and the world's criteria. You see, this man is someone who gives himself tirelessly to his community. His wife described him as compassionate and caring along with other similar words. And he is. In his retirement, he has become fully immersed in helping those less well off in his community – something which he has done throughout his life.

Added to this were his credentials as a Vietnam Veteran. That certainly put the points up on Eddie's board, and a long involvement in football added even more on to this. Then there was his family life. He has been married to two women with the same name. The first passed away with cancer some years ago and he nursed her through that time. There are children and grandchildren – he also went through the anguish of losing one of his sons. So there were lots of buttons Eddie could push on his difficult life, and how getting a 'break' through winning a million dollars would be an appropriate reward for all that he had gone through.

But, you know, that man wasn't focused on those difficulties. He kept speaking to Eddie about how blessed he had been throughout his life. While Eddie would come back again and again to how the man and his wife would spend any money they might win, this man replied quite clearly that it would not go first of all to himself.

You see, this man is a Christian and openly stated how much the church mattered to him. That's why he was counting his blessings and why he openly named the Lord as the source of them. And if he did win the million dollars, the first ten per cent – \$100, 000 – would be going to the work of the Lord through the church. That announcement would have stunned everybody in the audience and those watching on TV! That's a lot of money. Yet that was what this man clearly believed he ought to do.

Well, this man did win. And much as Eddie in his host position continued to promote the life-changing break that this would make, it was obvious his life had already been completely changed a long time ago.

While there are those who will say the prize couldn't have gone to a better man, it was clear this man himself had already met a much better man – the God-man, Jesus Christ, through faith. This is what so brightly shone through last Monday. And I pray it might challenge the hearts of many to think where they are with the God who has so richly blessed this man – and that was a long time before he was ever on the Millionaire Hot Seat!

*And they did not do as we expected,
but they gave themselves first to the Lord
and then to us in keeping with God's will.”
2 Corinthians 8:5*

Cover Photo Credit: Royal Botanical Garden, Cranbourne, Victoria

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‘Humility And How I Achieved It!’

Psalm 131

Though one of the shortest psalms, it's one of the hardest to learn. Why? Because it's all about humility and contentment and peace in our hearts – which doesn't exactly come easy. Paul said, **'I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content'** (Phil. 4: 11). He was not (we gather) a naturally contented person. He didn't suffer fools gladly. That may explain why God sent him a thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12: 1-10). God intended (by hook or by crook) to humble him because without humility there is no true holiness.

According to the title this is, 'A Song of Ascents and a Psalm of David'. We don't know whether David wrote it early or late in his life. D.A. Carson suggests that it's more likely to come toward the end of his life, after he has been humbled by such matters as Bathsheba and Uriah, and by the revolt led by his son Absalom. Humbled, less quick to imagine he alone understands, slower to take umbrage, and more impressed with the wise providence of God, he now writes, **'My heart is not proud, O Lord, my eyes are not haughty, I do not concern myself with great matters, or things too wonderful for me'** (1).

1. The Picture of Contentment (2)

'I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me' (NIV). David describes himself – not as a nursing child – but a weaned child. The days of breast and bottle are over. The child has grown and developed. The toddler is now on solids. Perhaps for some, weaning involved a struggle. For others, the transition may have been smooth and crisis free. But what-

A Song of Ascents

ever the experience, the toddler has left something behind that it once valued. One writer says, 'When we are weaned as infants we lose the milk we desired, in order to receive the solid food we need' (Ferguson).

For the toddler, it's enough to know that Mum is there; that Mum can hear; that Mum can see; that Mum's hand is available; that Mum is there to give a reassuring cuddle and a kiss to make things better. It's enough to know that Mum knows everything and can do everything; that Mum loves and

Psalm 131

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

*1 Lord, my heart is not haughty,
Nor my eyes lofty.
Neither do I concern myself with great matters,
Nor with things too profound for me.
2 Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul,
Like a weaned child with his mother;
Like a weaned child is my soul within me.
3 O Israel, hope in the Lord
From this time forth and forever.*

cares. That's the picture at the heart of this psalm. It's an encouragement to be childlike – but not childish. As Alex Motyer says, 'It's one thing for an adult to be childish – and unfortunately, all too possible. It's quite another to be childlike – and that takes a lot of working at!'

Jesus said, **'Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven'** (Matt. 18:3). The follower of Jesus must be childlike –

George D. Ball

content with the basic knowledge that he or she is known, accepted, loved, and cared for by God every day in every way.

2. The Pathway to Contentment (1)

Look at the three 'nots' in verse one. Reading between the lines it would seem that these were areas that David had difficulty in – and had to work at to overcome. There was a spiritual battle to be fought. Spiritual maturity, contentedness and humility does not come readily or naturally. There are things we have to do; we have spiritual responsibilities – both negative and positive.

Consider the negatives. **'My heart is not proud,'** or **'My heart is not lifted up'**. Literally, **'My heart is not high'** (1). The problem with the heart is that it has outgrown itself. It's out of proportion. It is too proud by nature. We smile at the proud Pharisee who 'prayed' in the temple, **'God, I thank you I am not like other men'** (Luke 18: 11). But we are like that proud Pharisee more than we recognise. We are proud of our achievements. We are proud of our family. We are proud of our children. We are proud of our education. We are proud of our choices. We are proud of our church. We are proud that we are not as bad as some others. But if we are going to reach humility, we need more of the attitude of the tax collector who wasn't even able to raise his eyes to heaven. John Flavel commented, 'They that know God will be humble; they that know themselves cannot be proud'. Peter exhorts us to **'clothe yourselves with humility toward**

one another, for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble' (1 Peter 5: 5). Usually the first thing we notice about a person is the clothes that they wear. They're visible and noticeable. Pride is immediately noticeable. So is humility. The word that Peter uses for 'clothe' can also mean 'tie on oneself'. Perhaps Peter had in mind the night when Jesus tied a towel around His waist and washed the feet of the disciples – something only a domestic servant would ordinarily do (John 13: 4). Jesus was the essence of humility. He **'did not come to be served but to serve'** (Mark 10: 45). He described Himself as **'gentle and humble in heart'** (Matt. 11: 28). Though He had everything to boast about, yet **'He humbled Himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross'** (Phil. 2: 8). Jesus sought the will of God and the welfare of others above everything else. Humility is not thinking great things about yourself. The humble person is not full of self importance, nor does he insist on his own rights.

David says, **'My eyes are not haughty'** (1). The eye in the Bible is often the organ of greed and desire. Eve saw that **'the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes...so she took of it and ate'** (Gen. 3: 6). David had been guilty of wandering eyes when he saw Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11). He has learned his lesson the hard way. We too must be careful that our eyes don't lead us off into covetousness and sin. The advertising business seeks to do just that. It wants us to believe that our life will be so much more pleasurable if only we have this or that. Not that there is anything wrong with wanting something good. The problem comes when you want it too much; when a good thing becomes an ultimate thing, when a

desire becomes a demand. John counsels us, **'little children, keep yourselves from idols'** (1 John 5: 21). Jesus warns us, **'The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness'** (Matt. 6: 22-23).

David continues, **'I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me.'** There are many things beyond our understanding. Life brings an endless stream of unexplained providences and problems that we can't solve. There are more questions than answers. There are pieces in the puzzle we can't quite fit. Things happen in our personal and family lives that we don't understand. Tragedies and atrocities are reported daily. There are things we can't explain. David had come to recognise that. But he was content to leave it in the hands of the all knowing and wise God. **'The secret things belong to the Lord our God'** (Deut. 29: 29). The Lord declares, **'as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts'** (Isaiah 55: 9). Alex Motyer writes, 'Our task is to learn to live with unsolved conundrums, resting upon the huge volume of truth that has been revealed to us in Scripture and upon the Lord God who has revealed himself as totally trustworthy'.

Consider the positive pathway to contentment. David says, **'I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother'** (2). Remember the picture of the weaned child. The toddler need not be anxious in Mum's presence within the sound of her voice. For the child of

God, there's nothing more important than walking in the presence of God and hearing His word. Remember the difference between Mary and Martha when Jesus came to visit.

'Mary sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was anxious and troubled with much serving.'

Jesus commended Mary.

'Mary has chosen the good portion which will not be taken away from her' (Luke 10: 38-42). We need not merely listen to the word but, like Mary, drink it in.

Peter exhorts us to, **'Cast all your anxieties upon Him for He cares for you'** (1 Peter 5: 7). We worry because we do not trust our Heavenly Father. Worry is a sign of unbelief. Worry is the quiet side of pride. If pride is sin, so is worry. We should treat worry as we treat sin. Hand it over in confession to the Lord as it occurs. We might have to do it many times a day – so be it. Jesus tells us, **'Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink or about your body what you will wear. Look at the birds of the air, they do not sow or reap or gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them'** (Matt. 6: 25-27). **'He cares for you'**. Martyn Lloyd Jones has said, 'The secret of a successful Christian life is just to realise two things; I must have complete confidence in God, and no confidence in myself'.

3. A Prayer for Contentment (3)

'O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore'. This is a similar conclusion to the previous psalm. The psalmist becomes an evangelist. His desire is that others too may enter into the peace and joy and confidence of trust-

ing in the LORD. Let us then live as weaned children knowing that our Heavenly Father will not withhold any good thing from those who walk uprightly (Ps. 84: 11). 'Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God' (Corrie ten Boom).

Prayer: O Lord, You are the One who opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Help us to humble ourselves under Your mighty hand. May we have more of the mind of Christ in us. May we know more peace and joy and confidence as we rest in You and

feed upon Your word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Past for Today

Christianity in Scotland (19): The Twentieth Century

Rowland S. Ward

Some recruits to the FCS ministry after 1904 were not in full sympathy with her position or were unsuitable men from other churches. Seventeen of the ministers in 1913 subsequently joined the Church of Scotland. However, a fully staffed Theological College was operating and Overseas and Jewish mission work had been re-established. On the other hand, the Free Church also had a Highland constituency averse to change. While good

steady work was done, the creativity of the early days of the Free Church had gone, and literary output was relatively meagre, until something of a renewal in the 1980s which has continued to the present. Reflecting recognition of her stand on the Church-State relationship the Lord High Commissioner as Queen's representative (or the Queen herself as in 1969) makes a courtesy visit to the Assembly, a tradition that has been

regular since 1930.

The Free Church community probably peaked around 80,000, many adhering after the 1904 Court Case. By the mid 1950s the Free Church had a community of about 30,000, while the current church attendance is around 13,000. In 2000 about 20% of the ministers withdrew because of disagreement in a disciplinary matter not involving doctrine and formed the *Free*

Church of Scotland (Continuing) with about 1,000 attenders.

They argued they had the right to continued protest over the decision they disagreed with, but their conduct was such that they came under discipline themselves. Their legal action for the property inevitably failed, and brought some discredit on their movement, and added to disunity in Reformed work. In 2003 the Free Church issued a fine new Psalter to be used alongside or in place of the 1650 Psalter.

Hardly had it been issued than there was agitation to al-



*Free Church of Scotland College 1973-74
The current FCS Assembly Moderator, John Nicholls, is front row centre.
In the 2nd row 4th from left is Dr Allan Harman, and 2nd from right is the author.*

low hymns and instrumental music which was achieved on a close vote [98 to 84] in 2010. While perhaps not a fundamental matter, this was a significant shift from a time-honoured practice dating from the Reformation. The way it was pushed through by its advocates without going through the Barrier Act caused concern to others. Part of the motivation was to facilitate Church of Scotland ministers and people moving to the Free Church because of unhappiness with the Church of Scotland liberal stance, particularly on practising homosexual ministers. So far about fifteen ministers have moved in this way as well as some congregations. The Free Church is showing good signs of life at the same as impatience in some areas with those holding the older form of worship.

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland

Most RPs had adopted 'new light' in 1863 such as enabled them to join the Free Church in 1876. The minority of 1863 continued but steadily declined during the 20th century to two small congregations. Two more small congregations were gained when some not happy with the Free Church change on worship (2010) joined her. In 2011 the historic testimony of the RPCS was placed in permanent obedience. The church still considers her objections to the Revolution settlement of 1690 and the terms of the Treaty of Union in 1707 are most consistently applied in the exercise of political dissent (eg. no voting or civil office) given the Monarch is the titular head of an episcopal Church of England. The oath of allegiance would seem to preclude seeking reversion to the position of the 1640s while this situation obtains. It appears that commitment to political dissent has not

been a requirement of membership since the 1960s.

United Free Church

The UF Church recovered from the heavy blow brought about by the loss of the legal case. In its 1906 *Act Anent Spiritual Independence of the Church*, the UFC General Assembly asserted the power to modify or define its relationship to the Confession of Faith. The vow became to "the doctrine of this Church, set forth in the Confession of Faith" rather than to "the whole doctrine of the Confession of Faith". A brief statement of doctrine was issued in 1921. Following an Assembly vote of about 480 in favour and 22 against, on 2 October 1929 the United Free Church joined with the Church of Scotland. Only 33 of the 1441 congregations voted against the union. A few continued advocating a voluntarist position and made some progress until about 1956 when there were about 25,000 members. Decline has since set in and currently there are about 3,000 members in 60 congregations. There had been a formal covenant with the Church of Scotland since 2006 but the Church of Scotland position on homosexual ministers has caused that to be reviewed.

Church of Scotland

The Church of Scotland took the opportunity provided in 1905 by the need for Parliamentary legislation to apportion the property of the Free Church between the Free Church and the United Free Church to include a clause which would permit the Church of Scotland to change the terms of subscription to the Westminster Confession. In 1910 a more relaxed subscription was adopted formalising what had been the common practice for two generations. In 1921 *Articles Declaratory of the Constitution of the*

Church in Matters Spiritual, which had been prepared by the church, were approved by Parliament, and duly enacted by the church in 1926. They were expressly prepared to facilitate union with the United Free Church, and this occurred in October 1929 as previously stated. While professedly Trinitarian they give the church a wide freedom to define the relation of its office-bearers and members to its doctrinal statements

'but always in agreement with the Word of God and the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith contained in the said Confession, of which agreement the Church shall be sole judge, and with due regard to liberty of opinion in points which do not enter into the substance of the Faith.'

The views of the church are thus prioritised over a doctrinal statement in a way that gives scope for a creed that fluctuates with the times. Thus was brought to something of a conclusion the struggle between Church and State that had troubled the Scottish church from the earliest days of the Reformation of 1560. The Church of Scotland was no longer the Established Church in Scotland but was recognised as the National Church with full spiritual freedom subject only to accountability under ordinary law for matters of a civil nature. The loose approach to doctrine that has existed for over a century in the Church of Scotland has come to the fore in social policies that suggest the views of a secular society are more significant than the teaching of the Bible. One should not underestimate the presence of godly people in her ministry and membership, but it is striking to note the number of Church of Scotland people who

have moved recently to the Free Church, which nowadays is evidencing a strong concern for evangelism and outreach.

Conclusion

The overall religious climate in Scotland today is one marked by the impact of secularisation. Today there are about 4,000 churches in Scotland served by about 3,500 ministers or priests. The membership of Protestant bodies generally peaked around 1956 or 1957. For example, the communicant membership of the *Church of Scotland* peaked at 1.32 million or nearly 25.7% of the population in 1957; it is currently about 370,000 or 6.9% of the population. About 1.7 million persons or some 32% of the population in the 2011 census self identified as Church of Scotland, not even as many who said they had no religion, but actual attendance is under 200,000 suggesting many on the roll are nominal. The denomination itself seems to follow many of the fashions of the world rather than Biblical beliefs and directives.

In the *Roman Catholic Church* decline set in from the 1980s and is only partially offset by migration from countries such as Poland and Lithuania. About 840,000 people or 16% of the population identified as Roman Catholic in the 2011 census. Reliable statistics on mass attendance are not available but is certainly well under 200,000. The shift from poor ghetto to integrated mainstream, as well as intermarriage and scandals in the church, have impacted Roman Catholicism significantly over the last century, and the lack of candidates for the priesthood is very marked compared with earlier times. So a professedly strict official approach in teaching and behaviour has not prevented many Roman Catholics having quite liberal

views. It is certainly true that Roman Catholic schools do not turn out faithful Roman Catholics in significant numbers.

The *Episcopal Church* is largely liberal and has about 24,000 communicant members. Smaller groups of evangelical or Reformed persuasion represent under 5% of the population but in some cases (for example, the Free Church of Scotland) are experiencing some modest increase in worshippers. Pentecostal and charismatic churches are represented. The largest non-Christian faith is Islam with about 77,000 adherents recorded in the 2011 census.

As in early Christian centuries, Christians need to have an holistic approach. On the part of the church there needs to be sound and direct Biblical teaching, and a solid apologetic that addresses far more effectively than typical young earth approaches the whole question of science and the Christian faith. There needs to be a recognition of the radical

calling of Christians in society as salt and light, and as those who demonstrate compassion and love in all their relationships. We are, after-all, exiles and strangers on the earth, so if we are to be marginalised it will be no new thing. To be the church in the wilderness, the church under the cross is better than to be merely the church of the established. Against the dark backdrop of western paganism it may be that God will be pleased to crown efforts at reformation with a Holy Spirit wrought revival of the truth as it is in Jesus.

This brings to a close Dr Ward's helpful look at Christianity in Scotland. All these articles together form a book published by Dr Ward and which is available from him at 2 Hadlow Drive, Wantirna 3152, Victoria, Australia, for the price (within Australia) of \$15, postage paid.

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: Rev. Graeme Hart, RPCA

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Be seriously challenged in your thinking and lifestyle
Afternoons free to relax – games, bushwalks and pool
Missions night Psalmody Good food Peaceful surrounds
Children's programme*

Brochures available now at your church

The World in the Banner

Sexuality and Gender

Findings from the Biological, Psychological, and Social Sciences.

A major new report, published today in the journal *The New Atlantis*, challenges the leading narratives that have been pushed in New Zealand regarding sexual orientation and gender identity – messages which are being pushed in our schools and our media in New Zealand and Australia.

Much of the research has been mentioned in our 2015 report *Boys-Girls: Making Sense of the Confusing New World of Gender Identity*.

Here is a brief summary of this latest report prepared by Dr Ryan Anderson who was a speaker at our conference last year.

“Co-authored by two of the nation’s leading scholars on mental health and sexuality, the 143-page report released today discusses over 200 peer-reviewed studies in the biological, psychological, and social sciences, painstakingly documenting what scientific research shows and does not show about sexuality and gender.

The major takeaway, as the editor of the journal explains, is that “some of the most frequently heard claims about sexuality and gender are not supported by scientific evidence.”

Here are four of the report’s most important conclusions:

1) The belief that sexual orientation is an innate, biologically fixed human property—that people are ‘born that way’—is not supported by scientific evidence.

2) Likewise, the belief that gender identity is an innate, fixed human property independent of biological sex—so that a person might be a ‘man trapped in a woman’s body’ or ‘a woman trapped in a man’s body’—is not supported by scientific evidence.

3) Only a minority of children who express gender-atypical thoughts or behavior will continue to do so into adolescence or adulthood. There is no evidence that all such children should be encour-

aged to become transgender, much less subjected to hormone treatments or surgery.

4) Non-heterosexual and transgender people have higher rates of mental health problems (anxiety, depression, suicide), as well as behavioral and social problems (substance abuse, intimate partner violence), than the general population. Discrimination alone does not account for the entire disparity.

The report, “Sexuality and Gender: Findings from the Biological, Psychological, and Social Sciences,” is co-authored by Dr. Lawrence Mayer and Dr. Paul McHugh. Mayer is a scholar-in-residence in the Department of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University and a professor of statistics and biostatistics at Arizona State University. McHugh, whom the editor of *The New Atlantis* describes as “*arguably the most important American psychiatrist of the last half-century*,” is a professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and was for 25 years the psychiatrist-in-chief at the Johns Hopkins Hospital. It was during his tenure as psychiatrist-in-chief at Johns Hopkins that he put an end to sex reassignment surgery there, after a study launched at Hopkins revealed that it didn’t have the benefits for which doctors and patients had long hoped.

GENDER IDENTITY

One of the consistent themes of the report is that science does not support the claim that “gender identity” is a fixed property independent of biological sex, but rather that a combination of biological, environmental, and experiential factors likely shape how individuals experience and express themselves when it comes to sex and gender. The report reviews rigorous research showing that “only a minority of children who experience cross-gender identification will continue to do so into adolescence or adulthood.” Policymakers should be concerned with how misguided school policies

might encourage students to identify as girls when they are boys, and vice versa, and might result in prolonged difficulties. As the report notes, “There is no evidence that all children who express gender-atypical thoughts or behavior should be encouraged to become transgender.”

They continue: “We are concerned by the increasing tendency toward encouraging children with gender identity issues to transition to their preferred gender through medical and then surgical procedures.” But as they note, “There is little scientific evidence for the therapeutic value of interventions that delay puberty or modify the secondary sex characteristics of adolescents.”

The report also highlights that people who identify as LGBT face higher risks of adverse physical and mental health outcomes, such as “depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and most alarmingly, suicide.”

What accounts for these tragic outcomes? Mayer and McHugh investigate the leading theory—the “social stress model”—which proposes that “stressors like stigma and prejudice account for much of the additional suffering observed in these subpopulations.” But they argue that the evidence suggests that this theory “does not seem to offer a complete explanation for the disparities in the outcomes.” It appears that social stigma and stress alone cannot account for the poor physical and mental health outcomes that LGBT-identified people face.

CONCLUSION

Mayer and McHugh observe that much about sexuality and gender remains unknown. They call for honest, rigorous, and dispassionate research to help better inform public discourse and, more importantly, sound medical practice. As Mayer and McHugh note, “Everyone—scientists and physicians, parents and teachers, law-

makers and activists—deserves access to accurate information about sexual orientation and gender identity.”

+ *FamilyFirst NZ*

New leadership for FamilyVoice

FamilyVoice Governing Board Chairman Dr Stuart Robinson announced today that FamilyVoice National Director, Dr David Phillips, will retire in December when Ashley Saunders takes over the national director's role.

“David and his wife Roslyn have led FamilyVoice, previously known as Festival of Light, for over 40 years,” Dr Robinson said. “Under their guidance during the past 14 years in particular, the South Australian branch has grown into today's national organisation with active branches in all states supported by a strong national office team in Adelaide.”

“In 2002 God gave me a vision for rebuilding what is now FamilyVoice into an Australia-wide Christian ministry for family, faith and freedom,” Dr Phillips said. “By His grace, that vision has now been fulfilled. But every leader needs to hand on the baton – and for Ros and me, that time has come. We believe that God has given Ashley Saunders the gifts he will need to lead FamilyVoice into the future.”

“Ashley is married to Lindsay and they have four children. He has uniquely relevant experience in law, politics and Christian ministry. He began his career as a solicitor and partner in a law firm, later serving as an alderman in local government and on the NSW State Executive of one of the major political parties. After training for the Christian ministry he has served as senior pastor in two Baptist churches. He comes to this ministry with a sense of God's calling to be a Christian voice promoting true family values in society.”

Dr Phillips will retire on Sunday 4 December, the day before Ashley begins. David will be available to offer advice and encouragement during the initial period as Ashley takes up the reins.

“Ros and I hope to be able to spend more time with our family

among other things,” Dr Phillips said. “But don't be surprised if we occasionally express a Christian view on important current issues facing our nation.”

+ *FamilyVoice Australia, Media Release, 29 August 2016*

Scotland (UK): 'Named Person' Scheme Deemed Unlawful

The UK Supreme Court has ruled in the case of *The Christian Institute and others v. The Lord Advocate (Scotland)*. The case concerns Scotland's highly controversial and unacceptably intrusive Named Person scheme.

On Thursday 28 July the five judges of the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that the Scottish government's Named Person scheme, as it stands, is unlawful. There can be no appeal. The scheme would have seen every child in Scotland under the age of 18 assigned a state guardian to monitor their 'well-being'. Christian Institute director Colin Hart praised the ruling as a win for families. However, the Scottish government remains 'firmly committed' to the scheme while reluctantly acknowledging it would have to be optional rather than mandatory. Praise God!

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | RLPB 373 | Wed 31 Aug 2016*

An Attack On Freedom Of Religion And Association

Legislation restricting religious schools and organisations from employing staff who share common values was today introduced in the Victorian parliament by the Andrews Government. The legislation puts the Labor Government at odds with Federal Labor leader Bill Shorten, who said he was not interested in 'telling religious organisations how to run their faith-based organisations'.

Australian Christian Lobby Victorian Director Dan Flynn said if passed, the Equal Opportunity (Religious Exceptions) Bill 2016, will significantly restrict religious schools' freedom to form communities based on beliefs and values. The effect of the bill will be to create legal uncertainty for churches that appoint non-clergy staff.

Where a church prefers a Christian over a non-Christian, they may have to defend this appointment before a Government tribunal.

“This Bill will attack the ethos of Muslim, Jewish and Christian schools,” Mr Flynn said. “It is appropriate that schools can employ staff that promote and adhere to their values. Christian schools and organisations merely wish to have the same freedoms in employing staff that apply to political parties.”

“Political parties can refuse to employ people who do not agree with their objectives and policies. Fair enough. So why is this Bill only seeking to limit the freedoms in Christian organisations and not political parties or other clubs?”

“Ironically, the Bill is discriminatory because it singles out religious bodies. The ACL calls on the Victorian Government to withdraw the bill, uphold freedom of association in religious schools and remove legal uncertainty for churches.”

+ *ACL, 31 August 2016*

Russia: Anti-Mission Law Kicks In

On 7 July Russia's President Vladimir Putin signed into law a controversial 'anti-terror' package which includes anti-mission measures that eviscerate religious freedom. Five cases came before the courts during August. A Hare Krishna devotee was acquitted. Of four Protestants to be charged (two of whom are foreigners), three have been fined and one was due in court on 29 August. Furthermore, a case was launched on 22 August against the director of an Adventist church who stands accused of illegal evangelism by sending Christian literature to the leadership of the district administration. [See <http://www.forum18.org/> for details.] Pray that the anti-mission measures will be either radically amended or repealed.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | RLPB 373 | Wed 31 Aug 2016*

Life under the Banner

Meditating On Purity

There is a popular weekly podcast out of the UK called “Unbelievable,” which often has Christians and non-Christians debating one another. One episode last year focussed on the attitudes that Christians and atheists have towards one another. Both the Christian and non-Christian guest were arguing for more civility. They were calling for both sides to actually listen to each other.

The moderator/host commented on how, judging by listeners’ responses, civil conversations tend not to rate as highly as out and out battles. The more heated things would get, the more likely people were to write in with their thoughts and reactions.

Conflict sells, doesn’t it?

Now of course, when it comes to Christians and atheists arguing with one another, I know which side I’m cheering for.

It’s easy to get riled up listening to the specious arguments of the opposition. Mind you, it also happens sometimes that the Christian side advocates bad ideas or false teachings, which brings about a different kind of frustration.

Sometimes my negative reactions may very well be a righteous response to falsehood and lies.

But I have to be careful that I do not react out of self-righteousness, trying to elevate myself in my own mind, while denigrating others.

The atheist and the mistaken Christian are both, in fact, our neighbours. We are to demonstrate an attitude of love and hospitality to them. Of course, we do not compromise the truth. But the truth we advocate calls us to live in peace with them, insofar as it is possible with us.

Impure Reactions

To put it another way, we are to demonstrate purity in how we respond to those around us, even those who are very impure in their thinking, and often impure in their

attitude toward us.

If they are impure in their reactions to us, if they demonstrate impure hostility toward our faith, it shouldn’t be because we were impure in how we treated them.

This is hard, isn’t it? It’s hard because the unbelieving world often forces its dogmas down our throats. It confronts us with its unbiblical ideology, its pagan world and life view, its moral degradation. It’s hard not to respond with self-righteous indignation, with the idea that we are smart while they are dumb, we are holy while they are scum.

And truth to be told, we like our impure thoughts, our impure reactions. We like to elevate ourselves while denigrating others. We also like to wallow in self-pity, lamenting how hard we have it as Christians living in a post-Christian society.

It’s also very possible that when confronted by the impurity of the world, we might be enticed by that impurity. For instance, we don’t really mind the impure pictures of scantily clad models that you just can’t get away from in the local mall. Or we’re fascinated by the impure violence that pervades so much of contemporary entertainment.

But remember Philippians 4:8 – “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”

Meditating on Purity

We are to meditate on whatever things are pure, pure referring here to being free from moral stain.

Paul is calling on his Philippians readers to meditate on the kind of purity that James was speaking of in James 4:7-8 – “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God

Jim Klazinga

and He will draw near to you.

Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

Pure hearts, not stained by the dirt of impure moral thoughts and behaviours, that is what James was looking for. Pure hearts are called to meditate on pure things, holy things, godly behaviours, righteous thinking, good living, as the Bible defines good according to the will of God.

But here’s the thing: we’re not going to stop being confronted with the world’s impurity. So what do we do? We need to respond to that impurity by using it as an opportunity to meditate on, focus on, that which is pure.

For example, perhaps you’ve heard about the internet website “Ashley Madison.” Its motto told us everything we needed to know: “Life is short, have an affair.” Last year its membership database was hacked. The names of people who signed up with this website were exposed. No surprise, the vast, vast majority of names were of men.

Sadly, many church members, including leaders, were discovered to have subscribed to this service. It was a cause for much grief. Grief not about the hacking, but grief caused by those foolish enough to think that their sin in this matter would not eventually be exposed.

Thinking about purity when we hear stories like this does not mean we cover our ears, close our eyes, and try to fill our minds with happy thoughts about unicorns and rainbows. Rather, a story like this can remind us to focus our hearts and our minds on the purity of biblical wisdom, and on the purity of marital fidelity. It can even be the cause, where sin has been exposed, for meditating on the purity of godly repentance, and hopefully, somehow, the purity of restoration.

Living Out Purity

So, we are to meditate on, think about, that which is pure. And even the impurity of this world can provide opportunities for doing so.

But not only are we to meditate on that which is pure, think about that which is morally upright, but we also are to do it.

As 1 John 3:3 tells us, “and everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.”

The idea here is not that by the very act of having hope, we are purifying ourselves. Rather, because we have hope in Christ, we purify ourselves. Because we know what Christ has done for us, and because we look forward to his return, in response to this we seek to live lives that are as pure as possible.

We should always seek to be more and more free from moral impurity, always seeking to do the good as God defines it, always striving more and more to do his will as he lays it out for us in Scripture.

Of course, we know that when it comes right down to it, we are powerless to purify ourselves. We know that if it were left up to us, we would be incapable of patterning our thinking and behaviour according to the pure standards of God’s word. We would want to do what is right in our own eyes, and our own eyes are much more attracted to impurity.

We desperately need the blood of Christ to wash us clean. Apart from Christ, apart from what he has done for us, dying on the cross, bearing the punishment for our sins, winning for us forgiveness of sins, accomplishing our salvation, apart from Christ and his work, we could never hope to purify ourselves.

First and foremost, it is the blood of Christ that cleanses us. Only in him, only in being joined to him, only having his Spirit live in us, can we ever hope to be purified. And only in him, can we ever hope to have the new life that enables us to seek after purity. Only as those who belong to him can we pursue holiness.

But as those who do belong to him, as those who trust in him, we do then go on to pursue holiness. We are actively engaged in the ef-

fort to purify ourselves. Not that we think we can somehow wash away our own sins. We wouldn’t be so presumptuous as to imagine that we can force God to love us, because we’ve done such a great job of being pure. But we seek to purify ourselves out of thankfulness for all that God has done for us in and through our Lord and savior.

How do we do this? We repent.

That shouldn’t be such a hard concept, right? We repent by acknowledging our sin and guilt, and by pursuing that which is good. We repent, by laying aside our sin, and doing that which we know God expects of us. We repent, by fleeing from wickedness, and fleeing to holiness.

What does this mean? It means focussing on that which is edifying, which builds us up, rather than that which we know is ultimately rubbish.

Purity In, Purity Out

There’s an old saying in the programming business: garbage in, garbage out. When we take in impurity, that’s what’s going to come out.

To illustrate this, we have a rather nice coffee maker at our house, a home version of the kind of machines you find at cafes. It makes a great cappuccino.

Mind you, our relationship with this machine got off to a rocky start. Apparently our tap water has certain impurities in it. Our coffee machine is sensitive enough that those impurities caused it to break down soon after we got it. We needed to have it repaired.

We started using only the purest water that’s sold in grocery stores, and it’s been working great ever since. (Feel free to stop by for a visit if you want to test this claim.)

You take in that which is morally impure, and your soul is going to get clogged up with all that impurity. You take in that which is pure, and things are run more smoothly for you, spiritually speaking. Why wouldn’t we then want to purify ourselves the best we can?

Take in that which is pure. Take in the Word of God and its teach-

ings. Talk about those teachings with one another. Do what you can to learn more about those teachings. Do what you can to cultivate in yourself a perspective on life that is centred on Jesus Christ, having him as the most important person in your life.

In this life, we will never be sinless like him. But we do have his sinlessness credited to us. Christ’s perfect righteousness, his perfect purity, God looks at us and sees that purity.

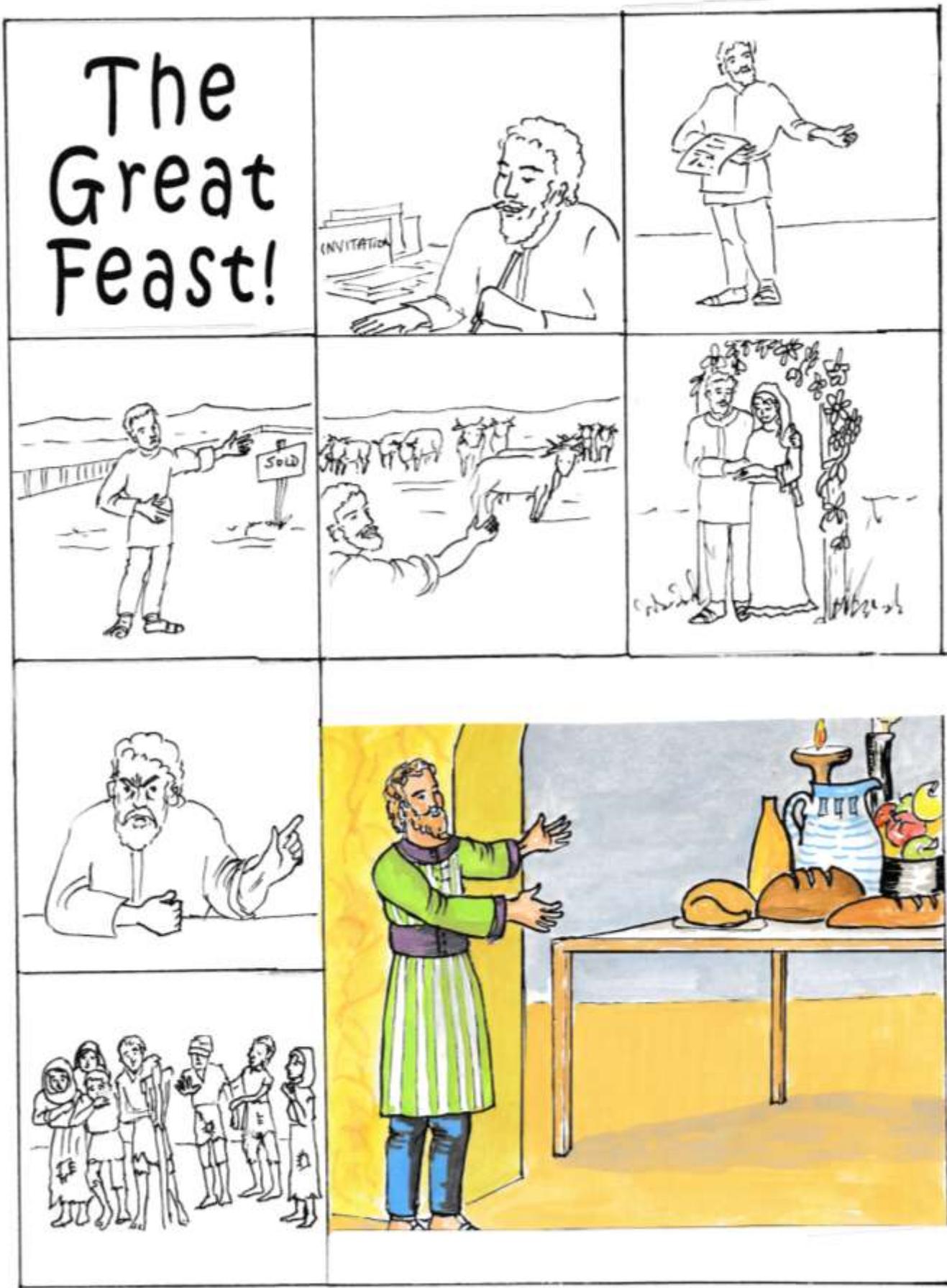
And if that is who we are, if we are people who have the status of being those who are credited with the righteousness of Christ, then we are going to want to do the best we can to live in a way that is consistent with that status.

And if that isn’t enough motivation, think about this as well: 1 John 3:3 speaks about those who have this hope purifying themselves. The hope that he refers to is the hope of knowing that Jesus Christ will return. It will be clear to everyone that he is Lord. It will be revealed to all that he is Lord over all. We will see him as he is. And at that time, we shall be transformed to be like him.

And rather than waiting until that time, thinking that, well, since we will be made pure then, we may as well be impure now; rather than thinking like that, we realize what a beautiful thing it is that awaits us, and we want to do all that we can even now to live our lives in a way that is consistent with that pattern of beauty. The purity that awaits us is something we want to experience is much as we can right here, right now.

You have a pure hope. Live out that hope. Live for purity. Meditate on that purity. Rejoice in that purity. And know that it will be yours forever, because of the purity and sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Children under the Banner — Luke 14:15-24



Prescribed Search Work

OCTOBER 2016

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

SENIOR AND INTERMEDIATE (Intermediate omit questions 5 and 8)

1 JOHN chapter 1

1. For what purpose did John and the other apostles declare what they had seen and heard?
2. What is the result of our walking in the light?
3. What does God do when we confess our sins?

chapter 2

4. Who is our advocate with the Father? For whose sins is he also the propitiation? (2 verses)
- x5. What is the difference between one who loves his brother and one who hates his brother? (2 verses)
6. If any man love the world, what is not in him?
7. What is the description of one who denies the Father and the Son?
- x8. On what condition will we have confidence at Christ's coming?

JUNIOR

2 KINGS chapter 2

1. What was Elisha's answer each time Elijah told him to stay behind at Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho?
2. What happened when Elijah smote the waters with his mantle?
3. How was Elijah taken to heaven?
4. What did Elisha cast into the spring [source] of waters to heal them?

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 Genesis Account: A Theological, Historical, and Scientific Commentary on Genesis 1-11,
by Jonathan Sarfati (Powder Springs, Georgia: Creation Book Publishers, 2015)

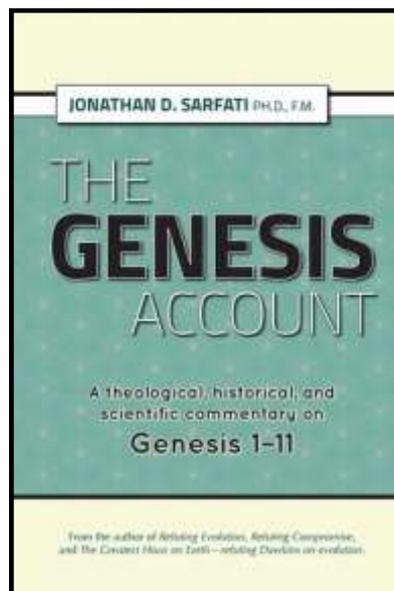
Outside of sermon preparation, it is not often that I read a commentary from front to back. If my reckoning is correct, this is only the third time and certainly the longest of the three – but it was well worth it! Dr. Jonathan Sarfati of Creation Ministries International has provided the Church a monumental resource on issues relating to the first 11 chapters of Holy Scripture.

Sarfati has produced a thorough commentary on Genesis 1-11 which takes Scripture seriously as the inerrant Word of God. The greatest strength of this volume is its commitment to the inspiration of the entire Bible and everything that necessarily must follow from that. For example, one of the foundational issues that confronts Genesis commentators immediately is authorship. Commendably, Sarfati appeals to all of Scripture to prove the traditional view that Moses wrote Genesis, though quite possibly collating materials from earlier. Throughout the commentary, he also refutes the arguments of the “documentary hypothesis” – the old liberal idea that several authors were responsible for the Pentateuch, authors who lived much later than Moses.

Generally, Sarfati lands on the right side of the issues in the interpretation of these chapters. He defends creation in six ordinary days -- a creation which happened thousands of years ago, not millions. He maintains that Adam was created on the sixth day out of literal dust from the ground, while Eve was created from Adam’s rib. There was a literal snake which led to a historical fall of the first man and first woman. Later, Sarfati makes the case for a global flood in the days of Noah. He gets full marks on the big-ticket items.

When we get down to some of the interpretive details, I disagree with Sarfati on some points. For example in Genesis 6:2, we read that “the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose.”

Sarfati vigorously argues the old view that “the sons of God” were angels. In other words, angels were married to human beings and had sexual relations with them. He argues that Jude 6-7 proves that angels engaged in sexual immorality. He argues that since angels can eat, surely they could also reproduce. I am not convinced. In their essence, angels are spiritual beings, not physical beings and therefore cannot engage in sexual relations, much less reproduce by inter-breeding with humans. I find the “Sethite interpretation” to be correct – people descended from Seth (the line of the Messiah) married rebellious unbelievers. However, I would also grant that Sarfati’s view falls under the umbrella of what we call “the freedom of exegesis.”



Several Serious Theological Issues

As a Reformed reader, regrettably, there are other areas where I cannot be as forgiving. While I have a lot of appreciation for the work Sarfati has done here, I would be remiss if I did not highlight several serious theological issues. One issue that arises here and there is Sarfati’s dispensationalism. He often quotes from (and refers to) fellow Messianic Jew Ar-

nold Fruchtenbaum, another dispensationalist and figure on the “biblical prophecy” scene. This view emerges when, for example, Sarfati argues that Genesis does not speak directly about the church. For a Reformed believer, Genesis is all about the church! Sarfati makes a distinction between the Old Testament people of God (Israel) and the church, but the Belgic Confession says in article 27, “This [catholic] church has existed from the beginning of the world and will be to the end, for Christ is an eternal King who cannot be without subjects.” Not unrelated to this is the muted development of covenant theology in this commentary. For example, there is hardly a word about God’s covenant with Adam and Eve either before or after the fall into sin.

Another issue which caught my attention was Sarfati’s occasional references to followers of philosopher Gordon Clark, particularly Gary Crampton and John Robbins. Clark was part of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church when it first began in 1936. However, theological complaints lodged against him eventually led to his departure in the late 1940s. In Clark’s thinking, logic and God are to be identified with one another. God is pure logic, according to Clark and his followers. Clark famously translated John 1:1, “In the beginning was Logic, and Logic was with God, and Logic was God...” Critics of Clark (like John Murray and Cornelius Van Til) argued that Clark had confused creation with the Creator. God stands sovereign over logic; he is not subject to it nor equal to it. Unfortunately, Sarfati seems to follow Clark’s reasoning in several places. It leads him to assert that maintaining the presence of any paradoxes, antinomies or tensions in Scripture (even apparent contradictions or humanly irreconcilable statements) is very dangerous. However, I would ar-

gue that this makes God, the author of Scripture, subject to our notions of what must be logical – far more dangerous! There are things taught in Scripture that are simply not capable of rational explanation – for example, the one God eternally existing in three persons. This is why the Belgic Confession says in article 9 that “this doctrine far surpasses all human understanding.”

Where This Book Is Helpful

Enough about the theological and interpretive issues – this commentary also promises to shed scientific light about the first chapters of Genesis. This is where this commentary is most helpful. A few examples will illustrate. Genesis 2:21 says that God created Eve from Adam’s rib. Sarfati notes the fact that human ribs can actually regenerate. Hence, Adam would eventually have had a complete set of ribs again. When discussing the Flood, the commentary points out that catastrophic plate tectonics can explain the mechanism of this deluge. How do we explain the formation of canyons that appear to be millions of years old? Sarfati de-

scribes how canyons have rapidly formed following catastrophic events like the eruption of Mt. St. Helens in 1980. Off the coast of Iceland, an island (Surtsey) appeared due to volcanic activity in 1963. Scientists have since been dumbfounded at how quickly Surtsey developed a “mature landscape,” including cliffs that would otherwise have been dated as far older. In many instances, I was skeptical of Sarfati’s claims. However, I did my own research on many of them and in every instance, so far as I could tell, his claims proved accurate.

This commentary aims to be scholarly in many respects. The author has used the original biblical languages – Greek and Hebrew are found throughout, but always transcribed. A lot of research is in the background, both biblical and scientific. However, an incongruent feature is the informal style of writing often used – this can be distracting in a commentary that strives to have an academic calibre.

The Genesis Account would especially serve well in the context of Christian education. Christian science and Bible teachers should have

this volume on hand and refer to it often – they will find that their teaching on creation-related issues will be greatly enhanced! Preachers would also appreciate it, especially when confronted with questions from parishioners. I regularly give my catechism students the opportunity to ask me questions. I am always surprised how many of the questions have to do with either the beginning (protology) or the end (eschatology). This book has already helped me to be better prepared to deal with the former. Last of all, all Christian households could benefit from having a book of this nature on hand as a reference tool. When you hear or read the claims of the world, Sarfati will typically lead you back to the solid ground of biblical teaching on origins. Yes, as noted above, there are some caveats, but overall this commentary can be recommended.

Reviewed by the Rev. Wes Bredenhof, minister of the Launceston Free Reformed Church. This originally appeared in ‘Una Sancta’.

Churches in the Banner



Scenes from the Ulverstone church renovations (described on page 16)



Churches in the Banner



Ulverstone

The winter car rally this year was organised by Steve and Julie Kingston from Launceston who did an outstanding job with questions, prizes, lunch time provisions and course setting.

The winners after a close competition were Luke and Tessa Keast who had moved

here from New Zealand in January. Luke and Tessa now have the privilege of setting next year's event!

A large field of 12 cars entered and enjoyed a full day's competition centred around Penguin, Riana, Camena, Stowport and Natone.

Recently works also began on the room modifications on the south west side of the church. This will combine two smaller rooms into a larger room with more versatile use, and eventually allow viewing access into the main worship area (see photos on page 15).

Building apprentice Shaun has been leading the changes which involved placing a support beam across the opened space.

ladies who meet at Knox PCEA church on Thursday mornings from 10 - 12 am, between April and October. While enjoying a friendly chat and a cuppa the ladies knit items for the needy such as scarves, beanies, children's jumpers and blankets which are distributed to the homeless, to AIM, Migrant Services and other such organisations (a list is available). The Lord has blessed the work and along with the formation of new friendships, one member has joined Knox Church and another attends the Ladies Bible Study. All are welcome

For more information contact Christine Carter on (03) 9879 3808

Knox

The Knox Knitters are a friendly group of



The group (above). From left front; Heather, Wendy, Lorraine, Jan, Anna; Back; Helen, Sandra, Sue, Rosemary, Jan.

