

# THE PRESBYTERIAN BANNER

June, 2008

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*Devotion: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes."*  
*Psalm 133:1-2*

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## THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IN MISSION

### *The Moderator's Address to the 2008 Synod*

The Incoming Moderator for 2008 was Dr. Dennis Muldoon of the Hawkesbury - Nepean Congregation. The following is his address delivered on Monday evening after the opening of Synod

Jonah had no love for the people of Nineveh. They were a vile and violent lot who used to raid his country. They were known for the way they tortured their victims and brutally killed them. Of late the Lord had given Israel respite from the wretched Assyrians. Jeroboam II was king over Israel and he restored the borders from the entrance of Hamath to the sea of Arabah according to the word of the Lord spoken through Jonah (2Kings 14:25).

Israel enjoyed peace and prosperity at this time. They felt secure and that the Lord was blessing them. In such a time they became complacent, proud and corrupt. The rich lived in luxury and oppressed the poor, but all the while they were very religious. Their religion focused on the coming Day of the Lord. We learn these things from the prophet Amos.

The people honoured God with their lips but their hearts were far from him. The church was dead. There was no sense of mission in the land. The people were spiritually smug and self righteous. They did not want outsiders spoiling their worship. The Jews were God's chosen people. They had no concern for the Gentiles. They thought and taught that such people had no place in the kingdom of God. God would destroy all such idolaters.

### Doctrine

In his book on the prophet Jonah, Hugh Martin (1866) makes the point that Jonah did not run away because the task God gave him was too difficult or dangerous. Nor did he run away in ignorance of God's character and his word. Jonah knew the attributes of God and he heard God's call loud and clear. Martin says that Jonah's 'motive for running away was that of a highly honourable and keenly sensitive child of God, very loyal to his King, very tender to his Father's glory'.

Whilst Martin admits that some may say he takes Jonah's part too much, the point he makes is valid and challenging. Jonah knew his doctrine. He knew that God created the earth and the sea (1:9). He knew God *was gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, one who relents from doing harm* (4:4). This is how God revealed himself to Moses (Ex 34:6). Interestingly Moses pleaded with the Lord not to destroy his people even when they made an idol to worship, and *the Lord relented from the harm he said he would do* (Ex 32:14). We see no such pleading from Jonah. Jonah knew the Scriptures even though he knew that God was the sovereign creator of all things and judge of all men.

The doctrine of the sovereignty of God is precious to us all. The Reformers strongly contended for this doctrine. We have their formulation in the Westminster Confession

of Faith, 3.3 - "by the decree of God... some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life and others fore-ordained to everlasting death". They went on to give a note of caution saying that "the doctrine of the high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care" (WCF 3.8). A glance at the history of missions in Reformed churches will show that such prudence and care has not always been exercised. At times the church has removed the sense of mystery and sought to preach the gospel only to the elect.

Mission is not contrary to the sovereignty of God, but rather, God is sovereign in mission. Granted that mission has often been undertaken with the emphasis on human responsibility, we must not go to the other extreme and deny human responsibility. William Carey knew the doctrine of the sovereignty of God as did the other Baptist pastors whom he met with for prayer in the mid 1780's. But it is well known that they did not agree with Carey when he was led to preach the gospel in India. 'Young man sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen he will do so without consulting you or me' he was told.

Tom Wells in his book 'A Vision for Missions' (Banner of Truth 1985) questions the accuracy of this account, but does acknowledge that these Baptist churches had 'fallen asleep under the influence of false, pseudo Calvinism'. He says we must not judge these men too harshly for they believed in prayer and clung tenaciously to God's sovereignty. But could we not say the same of Jonah? Jonah believed in the sovereignty of God but failed when it came to the command of God.

Carey was moved by reading a book by Andrew Fuller called 'The Gospel Worthy of all Acceptation' (1784). Fuller himself was moved by accounts of the Puritan John Eliot's mission to the North American Indians early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century- as were Brainerd and Carey. But Fuller struggled with what he read. He wrote 'I found also suspicion that we shackle ourselves too much in our addresses; that we have bewildered and lost ourselves by taking the decrees of God as rules of action. Surely Peter and John never felt such scruples in their addresses as we do. They addressed their hearers as men fallen men; as we should warn and admonish persons who were blind and on the brink of some dreadful precipice'.

Fuller was in a church which held to the sovereignty of God in election. But they went further, saying that if men are not among God's elect then we need not preach to them. God graciously delivered Fuller from such hyper-Calvinism. B.R. Easter (Puritan Papers 1962) gives some credit to Jonathan Edwards, writing that 'Edwards weaned Fuller from hyper-Calvinism to the classical position, according to which the unreserved character of the Gospel offer was maintained alongside unconditional election'.

What then of Calvin himself. He did not write any book or paper on mission and his concern for mission has often been questioned. He was of course preoccupied with re-

forming the church and setting true doctrine in place. But the doctrine of the sovereignty of God and divine election did not mean he had no concern for mission. In 1555 he sent clergy to a Huguenot colony in Brazil, to preach to the colonists and to the natives. In 1577 one of his students went to Constantinople to preach the gospel to the Muslims.

What of the Westminster Confession of Faith written in 1646? What does our own confession say with regard to the sovereignty of God in mission? This assembly declared that the Scriptures 'are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come' (WCF 1.8) which presupposes the Scriptures being taken to the nations. In the Directory of Public worship directions for prayer include the following 'to pray for the propagation of the gospel and the kingdom of Christ to all nations'. The emphasis is upon prayer, but prayer with the view towards the gospel being preached to all people in this world.

## Command

If Jonah's doctrine cannot be faulted where did he fail? Why was he running away from God? It was the com-

mand of God that he refused to accept. He knew the doctrine but it did not affect his heart. The words of Jesus in John 5:39-40 seem applicable to Jonah- *you search the Scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life... but you are not willing to come to me that you may have life.* Jesus was speaking to Jews, descendants of Jonah, who not only refused to have anything to do with Gentiles but even refused to listen to the Son of God. They were willing to test Jesus on the Scriptures but not willing to listen to him. Jonah knew the Scriptures but was not willing to obey God.

Hugh Martin might well have defended Jonah saying that at least he heard the command of God and took action. It was

the wrong action but still he did not place his human wisdom above the command of God. He did not say God cannot be telling me to go to Nineveh because all those wicked idolaters are predestined to go to Hell. Martin writes 'we learn how utterly worthless as a guide in duty man's own wisdom must ever be, even when acting in combination with the most highly exalted natural nobility'. We must be careful not to mix an element of man's wisdom or commonsense with the doctrine of the sovereignty of God.

It was the command of God that disturbed Carey. At the meeting in which he was rebuked by his brethren, he brought for discussion the topic 'whether the command given to the apostles to teach all the nations was binding on all succeeding ministers to the end of the world, seeing the accompanying promise was of equal extent'. Carey held that since the promise was till the end of the age so must be the command.

What was Calvin's view on the great commission? He maintained that the apostolic office was limited to the

***"Mission is not contrary to the sovereignty of God, but rather, God is sovereign in mission. Granted that mission has often been undertaken with the emphasis on human responsibility, we must not go to the other extreme and deny human responsibility."***

Twelve, especially in view of Papal claims. So did he hold that the command Jesus gave his apostles in Matthew 28:19 was no longer valid? Certainly not! For Calvin the sovereignty of God in election was no impediment to world wide evangelism. Commenting on the Great Commission he writes 'the Lord commands the ministers of the gospel to go to a distance, in order to spread the doctrine of salvation in very part of the world' (Commentary on Harmony of the Gospels).

God's command to Jonah was clear. It was not contrary to any doctrine. How could God's command be contrary to his doctrine! God's command was not negotiable. Jonah ran away but God brought him back and the command was reissued. *Go to Nineveh that great city and preach the message that I will tell you* (3:2). 'Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown' Jonah preached as he walked the streets of the city for three days. He preached the judgment of God as commanded.

The apostle Paul also preached divine judgment to the Gentiles (Acts 17), but also called for repentance. Jonah did not preach repentance, did not expect repentance and most tragically did not want repentance. But the people repented anyway. Even the king of this wicked and violent city repented before God. What a great display of the sovereignty of God. Did Jonah really understand the sovereignty of God? Do hyper-Calvinists really understand the sovereign power of God? If we really understand the sovereignty of God we obey his commands.

Many books have been written on the life of William Carey. That is understandable for he is regarded as the father of modern missions. There are many books about David Brainerd (1718 -1747), Henry Martyn (1781- 1812) and John Paton (1824-1907). Why so many books about these men? They were all Reformed men but were there not others? Why were there just a few Reformed missionaries? One wonders whether there were men who followed the path of Jonah, deciding for themselves that God only wanted the elect to hear the gospel.

In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century there was a decline in devotion and missionary zeal. Calvinism had become skewed and unbalanced. The command of God to go into all the world and make disciples was ignored. The truth is that nothing in Calvinism precludes the universal offer of the gospel. 'Election does not frustrate or overshadow' the free offer of the gospel. 'Missionary duty' writes Easter 'rests on God's will of command, not his secret purpose'.

Men like Brainerd, Carey, Martyn and Paton knew Reformed doctrine and they also knew God's command. They gave their lives, a short life in the case of some, to take the gospel to all the nations. In these nations they

saw the people as sheep without a shepherd. Their desire was for God's elect to be brought to him, and all to the glory of God. They obeyed God's command. They had been given new hearts when they were saved, hearts of flesh and not of stone. Like their God they were gracious and merciful, desiring the salvation not the destruction of the lost.

It is inspiring to read the diaries of these young men who obeyed the Lord in taking the gospel to all the nations. I recently listened to a talk on the life of Henry Martyn who went to India in 1806. He translated the NT into Hindustani, Arabic and Persian. He preached to the poor in cities across north India before going on to Persia where he died of TB six years later aged 31. When the speaker mentioned the cities of Patna and Kanpur, not just my ears but my heart listened. I do not know how many people lived in these cities when Martyn preached in them, but today there are over a million people in each city still worshipping idols or Allah. Would Henry Martyn want us to kept writing books about his life or would he want us to

follow his example and go into all the world and preach the gospel.

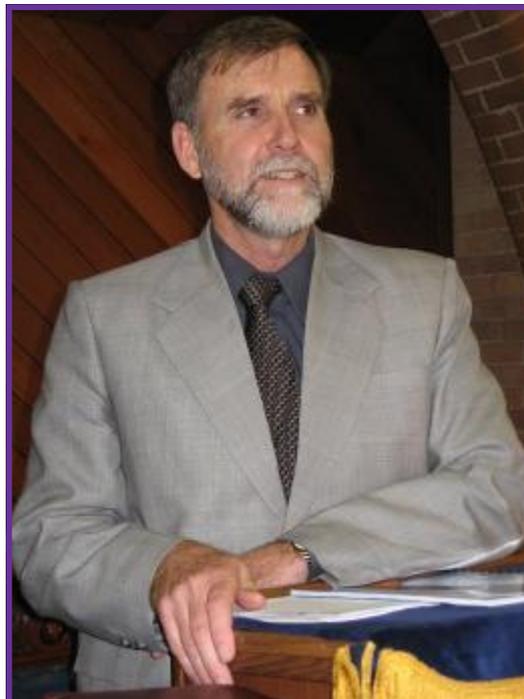
### Promise

God in his sovereignty commands us to preach the gospel to all nations. But he does not simply say go. Jesus said go and make disciples of all nations but there is a promise attached- *lo I am with you always even to the end of the age* (Mat 28:20). Also notice that before issuing the command he said *all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth*. What a great statement declaring the sovereignty of God the Son. It was this promise that moved Carey to ask about the command as we have seen.

Mission is God's work from beginning to end. Jesus earlier told his disciples *pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest* (Mat 9:38). Prayer must accompany mission from the beginning. We dare not go without prayer, or without a firm knowledge of the sovereignty of God. We must know the doctrines God declares in the Bible and also the commands he gives in the Bible.

Whilst God can and does bring people into the church to hear the gospel just as he brought Naaman to Israel and also the queen of Sheba, he also sent Jonah to go to Nineveh. God did not bring Indians to Carey's church in Britain; he sent Carey and Martyn to India although today many Indians are on the doorstep of Carey's old church! Let us pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into the harvest field and let us obey his command go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded to the glory of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Picture: Dr. Dennis Muldoon [Moderator]]



# WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

## The Retiring Moderator's Sermon - Dr. Rowland S. Ward

John 4:24 is a familiar text: "God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth." Yet although this text is described by one writer as "the most important teaching on worship in the entire New Testament" it is difficult to find an entirely satisfying explanation of it in the commentaries. Even books on worship seem to pass over it very lightly. This may be because it is assumed that the text is merely stating that worship must agree with God's nature, not be formal but from the heart but in my judgement this is only to touch the surface. I'd like therefore to explore this passage in some detail.

### The context in John's Gospel

After the Prologue of John 1:1-18 we have incidents over seven days that can be summarised this way.

**Day 1** testimony of John the baptiser (1:19-28)

**Day 2** 'the next day' (v.29) second testimony of John: Jesus described as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and has the one endowed by the Spirit who will in fact baptise with the Holy Spirit (1:33).

**Day 3** 'the next day' (v.35) third testimony of John: disciples follow Jesus as the Messiah.

**Day 4** 'the next day' (v.43) Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael who calls Jesus 'the King of Israel'. Nathaniel is told that in future he will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man (1:51), so Jesus will be the means of communication between heaven and earth.

**Day 7** 'on the third day' (2:1) there was a wedding in Cana. Given the event as the climax of a series of incidents over seven days, we can recognise the glory of Jesus shown on this occasion includes the fact that he is the host of the ultimate wedding banquet of which the original creation Sabbath spoke, and that the promised age of the new covenant that supersedes the old covenant is at hand.

Jesus then commences his ministry with the cleansing of the temple at Passover time and the saying about himself as the true temple (2:12-22). So Jesus looks beyond the era of temple worship, and feasts like Passover. Communication between God and humanity will be through Jesus as a result of his death and resurrection, and not through the temple of stone that represented the presence of God among his people, and the sacrifices that spoke of purification.

Then in John 3 we have a religious leader named Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night and receiving instruction about the necessity of being born from above by the Spirit, since earthly things cannot bring what is necessary for entry into the kingdom of God. When we come to John 4 we have Jesus striking up a conversation with an unnamed Samaritan woman at midday. There are intended contrasts with the Nicodemus incident here, and the two narratives are linked by specific testimony concerning

Jesus as the one sent from God to whom God has given the Spirit without limit (3:34).

This rich background must inform our understanding of the case of the Samaritan woman.

### The cultural context

The Samaritans were descended from Israelites who had intermarried with their Assyrian conquerors in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. They revered the books of Moses with its references to a prophet like Moses, but rejected the prophets who of course spoke of the coming Messianic King from David's line. The Jews had destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mt Gerizim in 128BC, and the Samaritans had retaliated by defiling the temple with human bones one dark night several years before Jesus' birth.

That Jesus should initiate a conversation with the Samaritan women, and be ready to drink from what she provides is itself quite revolutionary. A Jewish man would not even

talk to his own wife in public, and would not share vessels with Samaritans, but Jesus crosses the social and religious divide and the bitter hostility of centuries. In his conversation he brings the woman to realisation of both her need and his ability to meet that need. The saying of Ephrem the Syrian (306-73) is well known: "the woman sees a thirsty man, then a Jew, then a Rabbi, then a prophet, finally the Messiah. She tries to get the upper hand over the thirsty man, she disliked the Jew, she heckled the Rabbi, she was swept off her feet by the prophet, she adored the Christ."

### The worshippers the Father seeks

Without tracing each step suggested by Ephrem, I want to concentrate on the woman's statement in verse 20 and Jesus' response. She said: '*Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.*' Like Nicodemus she was thinking on the earthly plane. The question for her was the competing claims of Jerusalem and Mt Gerizim as centres of worship on earth. Where is the right place to worship? That is her question. Jesus responds, '*Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.*' Jesus is saying that neither Gerizim or Jerusalem will be the place of worship. He hints at the theme which comes out of the cleansing of the temple incident in John 2: Jesus himself in his death and resurrection replaces the temple.

He goes on, '*You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.*' He here affirms that the promises of God come to fulfilment through Jewish history not Samaritan history. Jesus adds, '*Yet an hour is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks.*' Yes, Jewish history is coming to a climax in Jesus. The last days have come and the promised fulfilment is at



hand. The temporary institutions of Israel are to be superseded in order that we may draw near as children to a father. The Father is seeking those who worship in spirit and in truth.

It should be obvious by now that Jesus is not saying that from now on God is looking for heart-felt worship, for it has always been true that a broken and a contrite heart he will not despise (Psalm 51:17). Similarly, he is here talking about God being near to all who call upon him wherever they are. Rather, he is speaking of the location of worship and access to the presence of God. Worship at Mt Gerizim was unlawful and worship at Jerusalem temporary. The unlawful was always unlawful and unacceptable 'you don't know what you worship' for 'salvation is from the Jews'. What was represented in the Jewish tabernacle/temple was temporary but is now fulfilled in Jesus. Consequently there is no salvation except in the way God has appointed.

That way is 'in spirit and in truth' and these two terms must be understood in contrast to what is passing away. *Spirit* means in the realm of the Spirit rather than in the realm of the material and physical which characterised Old Testament tabernacle/temple worship. Jesus himself is the source of the living water which describes the life-giving Spirit, by whom people are born from above (John 3:6-8). *Truth* means the reality as contrasted with the shadows of the institutions which God gave through Moses. Compare John 1:17: 'The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ.' The law was prescribed by God but it was not the very reality, the truth that is in Jesus (John 14:6; Eph 4:21). Jesus himself was to take the place of the temple (cf. 2:21).

So the saying means that the Father is seeking worshippers who worship in the realm of the Spirit and according to the truth as it is in Jesus. It is still centralised worship, but it is worship which corresponds to the accomplished redemption and the age of the outpoured Spirit in which we live. The expression 'in Spirit' or 'in the Spirit' reminds us of John's identical expression 'in the Spirit' in reference to the vision he received on the Lord's Day and at other times (Rev 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). John saw things in heavenly places. Paul writes that believers are raised with Christ and seated with him in heavenly places (Eph 2:6). Worship in (the) Spirit is worship that enters by faith into the heavenly realm.

The one who 'pitched his tent/tabernacled' among us (John 1:14), has been endowed with the Spirit beyond measure. Just as Jesus by his death and resurrection erects the true temple and provides the means of communication between heaven and earth, so he obtains the life-giving Spirit for us that in faith and union with Christ we might be living stones in the spiritual temple.

Jesus reinforces his statement: '*God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth*'. (1) It is not precise enough to say that God is a spiritual being, and so we must worship in ways appropriate to his non-material nature. God is not a spirit among other spirits. In any case worship in sincerity from the heart was always required by God. (2) The statement may not refer to God's essence at all but rather the way he relates to us and thus should be read God is Spirit capital S. It would then serve to empha-

size that God relates to us through the Holy Spirit. (3) But perhaps it is enough to say God is spirit (not a spirit) and therefore is not accessible by us except through the Spirit given by Jesus. As the flesh gives birth to flesh and the Spirit to spirit (3:6), so we must worship according to/or in the realm of the Spirit. And to be 'in the Spirit' is to see by faith the reality of heavenly things in Christ.

### Some implications

In the Epistle to the Hebrews we have an inspired commentary on the superiority of what has come in Jesus. It is addressed to Jewish Christians who were tempted to return from the simplicity of early Christian worship to the impressive ritual of Judaism. The writer tells us of how revelation has climaxed in Jesus the Son of God, a greater than Moses, a superior High Priest, a mediator of a better covenant. He tells us that the earthly sanctuary has been superseded by a heavenly sanctuary. It is by faith that we enter into heaven itself where Christ is (Heb 10:19ff). We see by faith what is invisible and not seen.

Our worship may seem simple, unadorned, not exciting. But if we have eyes of faith to see it, we come to the true Mount Zion (Heb 12:22), the spiritual Jerusalem (Gal 4:26). The earthly temple has gone but is replaced by the materials of a spiritual house that is more glorious than the former (cf. Haggai 2:7), and is in principle seated with Christ in heavenly places. Jesus Christ is openly pictured before us in the preaching of Christ as crucified (Galatians 3:1). This, and not a physical picture, is the kind of icon of Jesus that is legitimate, as is the visible word of the sacraments given by Christ. It follows that as the location of our worship is in Christ through the Spirit, the emphasis must be on knowing, a knowing which involves head and hands, heart and feet, emotions and will. Hence we have Paul's constant prayer that 'the eyes of your heart may be enlightened that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and the incomparably great power for us who believe' (Eph 1:18).

Worship that requires a building of great magnificence, worship that is a kind of show and display by us, worship that is physical drama and parade, something that makes us feel good in the same way we feel good after a bit of fine music or a powerful movie, is not spiritual worship. Clapping and dancing and great instrumental music is not as such spiritual worship however much it entertains us.

Worship matters to God. He seeks those who will worship in spirit and in truth, who will worship in union with Christ by the Spirit. Do our congregations operate on this level? Perhaps we are clinging merely to particular simple forms of worship without seeing the reality of worship in Spirit and in truth. We treasure the word of God, and our simple form of worship is consistent with worship in spirit and in truth, but our knowledge of the word does not save us but the one of whom that word speaks (John 5:39).

True worship is in union with Christ by the Spirit, and involves access into the very presence of God through faith. It is worship that enthralled because it centres on Christ and his accomplishment for us. It is worship in the Spirit because we enter by faith into the very courts of heaven. It is worship that enables us to sing with true appreciation as we gather each Lord's Day – **[Continued on page 11]**

# BLOGGING ABOUT...

## SYNOD 2008.

**General.** It was a short Synod. By Wednesday afternoon all that was left to do was to appoint a Moderator for next year, and set the date and place of next Synod. It could have been even shorter if Conveners of Committees could resist the urge to repeat everything they put in their Reports! The Moderator, Dr. Dennis Muldoon, did a good job in controlling the Synod. We had almost an hour of devotions each day - dealing with the Prayers of the Bible [Daniel's Prayer; Nehemiah's Prayer; and Jonah's Prayer] - and on Wednesday morning, when we saw that the business would be comfortably completed, we had an extended period of prayer for the church, missions, and those in need. The ladies of the Hunter Barrington Congregation looked after us very well, providing morning and afternoon teas, and sandwiches for Lunch. Our evening meal was in the Panthers Club. The food was good and plentiful, and some didn't seem to have much self control. If word gets out about it, it will be easy to get Rep Elders! Thank you Hunter Barrington for looking after us all so well!

**Opening.** The Synod opened on Monday afternoon with the Retiring Moderator's Sermon. Mr. Ward preached on John 4, especially focusing on the worship of God in spirit and in truth. He pointed out that the key point in this statement was location and access to God, and both are found in the Lord Jesus. Since we had a bit of spare time afterwards, there was some discussion on the sermon. After the evening meal, the Moderator took the chair, and gave his Moderatorial Address. It was called "The Sovereignty of God in Mission" and he based it on the attitude and experience of Jonah. Jonah tried to run away from the Lord, but he brought him back. Likewise, the Church sometimes fails to obey the great Commission, but the Lord continues to lead it in the fulfilment of his purposes and the salvation of people. Both these addresses are published in this issue under the direction of Synod.

**Visitors.** We had a number of visitors to the Synod. One was the Rev. Dr. Allan Harman who spoke on Tuesday morning. He brought the greetings of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, spoke about his visit to Dumisani Theological Institute and presented to the Synod a folder containing some old Church Documents which he found in his father's possession. In the afternoon two other delegates spoke to us. One, Rev. Reinier Noppers, brought the greetings of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. He spoke of their dearth of ministers too. They have about 5 vacant congregations out of 19 [and now that Sjik Bajema has accepted the call to Narrewarren this will add another. See his full report on page 12] Following him was the representative from the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, Rev. Garry de Vries. He

said their church was trying to refocus on the great truth of "the priesthood of all believers." He emphasized that the viability of the Church depended more on how people lived than anything else. Our Church not only reciprocated the greetings brought, but also agreed to send a representative to the Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand meeting later this year. The delegate will be the Clerk, the Rev. Trevor Leggott. Later in the Synod [Thursday morning], Dr. Alistair Wilson brought the greetings of the Free Church of Scotland

**Missions.** On Wednesday afternoon the Synod welcomed Dr. Alistair Wilson, and his wife Jenny missionaries from South Africa. Alistair is Principal of the Dumisani Theological Institute, and Jenny not only assists in the classroom, but also helps produce Sunday School material. Alistair spoke on developments in New Testament studies, homing in on the interpretation of the Parables. Jenny spoke about life on the South African field, and the need there is for the Gospel. At the usual Missions night on Wednesday evening both again talked about their respective fields of work, areas in which support was needed [books for the library at Dumisani] and prospective development of the site to give more space for all the facilities needed. They also gave a Power Point presentation of their work. The meeting was well supported by the Hunter Barrington Congregation, and questions were asked and answered. The Rev. Peter Smith, the Missions Committee Convener, not only thanked Alistair and Jenny for their work, but also announced that a gift of \$7,000 would be given from Missions and Congregational collections for the Library at Dumisani. The suggestion was also made that they might consider naming the collection of books provided after Dr. Campbell Andrews who labored diligently there for many years.



**The Big Debate.** The main business of the Synod this year focused on a debate about the approval of an Alternative Form of the Questions and Formula to be put to and signed by office Bearers in our Church. This debate started first thing on Tuesday morning and lasted until about 3.00 pm when the vote was taken. At first an attempt was made to prevent it coming to the Synod at all since it was rejected last year. It was argued that the Committee had no remit to bring it forward, and there was no reference to the Barrier Act in the Recommendation. It was admitted with voting in favour 9/8. Then followed the discussion covering such issues as its difference from the present formula, and the impracticality of using two formulas in the Church. When all was said and done, it was approved by a majority of 1 vote [9/8 again]. So by the narrowest majority possible the alternative formula was adopted. A number dissented with reasons concerning the decision, and one dissented without reasons.

Are there any differences between the alternative Questions and Formula and the old one? There are obvious differences in wording. And if there's a difference in



**FELLOWSHIP**

words there might be a difference in meaning too. But to cover the possibility of difference Synod declared that “if any question of interpretation shall arise the obligations of the said Act [Act of Synod, 1952] shall be decisive.” So, we now have two “Questions and Formulas”. Prospective office bearers can choose either one to sign. But they still have to understand the old one thoroughly because that’s the important one.

This is just a short report. Perhaps Conveners of the various Committees might like to provide more details about the business of their respective Committee endorsed by Synod if they feel that more must be said. The Synod closed on Thursday morning at 10.45 - to meet next year the Lord Willing in the Knox Church, Melbourne in the first half of May, and the Rev. John McCallum was appointed as Moderator Elect for it.



**QUIET CHATS**



**CONCENTRATION**



**FOOD**

# Run For Glory

## GREEDY DOGS!

***“They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough.” Isaiah 56:11.***

“Greedy dogs” always want the best bits for themselves. They like to fare better than all the rest. They will quarrel with any cat or dog or man who tries to filch their dainties. They will even steal another’s food if it looks better than their own. Is not that exactly like some boys and girls? I won’t tell you their names; but I will tell you of some of the things they do. At a party they always scramble for the best places; at dinner they always cry out for the best bits. They want their pudding to be all plums, and their cake all currants. If you offer them an apple they choose the largest on the plate; a toy they choose the very prettiest; a book they choose the handsomest and best. They never leave the best for anyone else. Their greediness makes them try to grab all the good things for themselves.

Very small children may be forgiven their selfishness. They are not old enough to know better. They will cry for the moon, and try to grasp everything in their tiny hands. But as we grow older we ought to grow wiser, and learn to be better than the “greedy dogs”. We cannot all have the best things, and we should be willing to give other people a turn.

Greedy Dogs’ always keep their good things to themselves. Their motto seems to be ‘Get all you can, and keep all you can’. Did you ever notice a dog with a bone? He looks round every second with a suspicious growl; and

if another dog approaches, you don’t find him offering to go shares. Not he! He snarls, and shows his teeth, and looks very vicious, and the sooner the newcomer disappears the better it is for him. He will get a bite of the wrong sort if he is not quick. We do not blame dogs for acting so, ‘it is their nature to’; but boys and girls should know better and do better. They should be like King Alfred. The story tells how often he was in sore straits when pursued by the Danes, and at one time was brought so low that he and the queen had only a single loaf of bread. That day a poor man came and knocked at the door and asked for charity. ‘We have only got one loaf; it is not enough for ourselves,’ said the queen. But King Alfred replied, ‘Give him half of it; he is a Christian’. And they gave him half. How much nobler it is to go shares, like the king, than to stick to what you have got, like the dog! ‘Then be not dog like, but king like, and make it a rule to go shares with your pleasures and comforts and possessions. Don’t keep them all to yourselves, but give some of them away. Don’t be greedy, but generous.

Jesus Christ thought not of ‘self’ when He left heaven for earth, and lived, toiled, and died for poor and sinful men. His heart was full of love, and He laid down His life for the sake of others. Then let us pray and strive to be like Him. It is shameful to be “greedy dogs”. It is Christlike to be unselfish, generous, and loving; nor could higher praise be given. [G. HOWARD JAMES, Talks to Young Folk, p7].



**“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.**

**I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”**

**Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence.**

**He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wing you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.**

**You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.” [Psalm 91]**

# A LIFE OF LEARNING

# SEARCH WORK - JUNE

SENIOR 12+ yrs; INTERMEDIATE 10-11 yrs; JUNIOR 9 and under.

June, 2008

## SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE

Intermediate omit questions 5 and 8 [Marked with an x]

### 2 SAMUEL 18

1. Before the battle, how did David ask Joab, Abishai, and Ittai to deal with Absalom?
2. What happened to Absalom when he rode under the oak [terebinth]?
3. How did Joab kill Absalom, and what did they do with his body? (2 separate verses)
4. How did Cushai [the Cushite] answer when David asked if Absalom was safe? What was the king's reaction? (2 verses)

### Chapter 19

5. (x) What did the king do after he was reproved by Joab for his grief over Absalom?
6. What was David's answer when Abishai wanted to put Shimei to death?
7. What reply did Mephibosheth make when told to divide the land with Ziba?
8. (x) What was Barzillai's answer when David asked him to come with him to Jerusalem? (4 verses)

## JUNIOR

### GENESIS 32

1. How did Jacob feel when he heard that his brother Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men?
2. Why was Jacob's name changed to Israel?

### Chapter 33

3. What did Esau do when he first met Jacob?
4. Why did Jacob urge Esau to take a present from him?

SEARCH WORK TO: MRS I. STEEL, PO Box 942, EPPING 1710.  
E-mail: iesteel@gmail.com



## MINE!

"I once heard of a nobleman who went up to the top of his spacious park with a friend who lived near, and when they reached the top of the park and saw the beautiful prospect, the nobleman began to show his friend all his fine estate. "There you see those beautiful trees, those splendid fruits, those rich lands they are all mine as far as your eye can stretch, all those rivers are mine, all those cows and those fields are mine and those are my houses where my labourers live." The friend said, "Well, but the poor old woman who lives in that cottage there can say more than you can, my lord'. "What is that?" "She has more than you, my Lord; she can say "Christ is mine." [James Vaughan]

- ◆ I've learned that our dog doesn't want to eat my broccoli either. Age 7
- ◆ I've learned that when I wave to people in the country, they stop what they are doing and wave back. Age 9
- ◆ I've learned that just when I get my room the way I like it, Mum makes me clean it up again. Age 12
- ◆ I've learned that if you want to cheer yourself up, you should try cheering someone else up. Age 14
- ◆ I've learned that although it's hard to admit it, I'm secretly glad my parents are strict with me. Age 15
- ◆ I've learned that brushing my child's hair is one of life's great pleasures. Age 26
- ◆ I've learned that wherever I go, the world's worst drivers have followed me there. Age 29
- ◆ I've learned that if someone says something unkind about me, I must live so that no one will believe it. Age 30
- ◆ I've learned that there are people who love you dearly but just don't know how to show it. Age 42
- ◆ I've learned that you can make some one's day by simply sending them a little note. Age 44
- ◆ I've learned that the greater a person's sense of guilt, the greater his or her need to cast blame on others. Age 46
- ◆ I've learned that children and grandparents are natural allies. Age 47
- ◆ I've learned that you can tell a lot about people by the way they handle these three things: a rainy day, lost luggage, and tangled Christmas tree lights. Age 51
- ◆ I've learned that regardless of your relationship with your parents, you miss them terribly after they die. Age 53
- ◆ I've learned that making a living is not the same thing as making a life. Age 58
- ◆ I've learned that whenever I decide something with kindness, I usually make the right decision. Age 66
- ◆ I've learned that everyone can use a prayer. Age 72
- ◆ I've learned that even when I have pains, I don't have to be one. Age 82
- ◆ I've learned that I still have a lot to learn. Age 92

**Paul:** "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Philipians 4:12-13

# ACTIVITY PAGE.....

## An Important Question

From: *Search and Solve: Bible Activity Sheets* by Betty DeVries [Illustrated by Donna Greenlee] Baker Books, 1998.

The Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, "What must I do to be saved?" They gave him a good answer. Can you decode it? If you need help, see Acts 16:31.

O I V G B J E X K M F Q A  
A B C D E F G H I J K L M  
R S Z W L D P Y H T C N U  
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z



I B Q K B H B

K R P X B Q S L G M B D Y D

O R G N S Y T K Q Q I B D O H B G

## OUR FATHER

"There was once a great Roman emperor going through Rome in grand triumph, surrounded by all his attendants, his courtiers, and his soldiers; he himself was riding in a chariot, accompanied by sound of trumpets...! The emperor was in the midst of that great procession, when a little child came out of the crowd and ran up to this great man, and of course he was put back. They cried out: "Go back, little child! Go back! Go back! He is your emperor!" And the little child said, "Yes, he is your emperor, but he is my father!" How beautiful it is to say of the Lord, 'He is my Father!' "Your Father!"

- James Vaughan.

### MOSQUES AND MIRACLES:

#### Revealing Islam and God's Grace.

By Stuart Robinson, City Harvest Publications, Upper Mt Gravatt, Qld 2003 (no price marked)

Islam is a hot topic of discussion these days because of the presence of many Muslims in western countries and widespread concern about international terrorism. It is not an old religion but has been around since about 600AD (Mohammed born 570AD). Robinson gives a very comprehensive overview of Islam, including its history, teachings and present day advance. He gives details about its advance country by country, including Australia.

Africa is where the church is most directly confronted by Islam and has been for centuries. 'In 642AD they swept south and attacked Nubia...but the Christian kingdoms of northern Sudan stood firm' and the advance was halted at that time. But in the last century Sudan has again been severely impacted. The inflow of petrodollars has enabled the construction of hundreds of mosques in Africa and Asia. Islam has an inbuilt policy of 'Dar Al-Islam' or the rule of Islam and Shariah Law. The world is divided in to Dar Al-Islam (a country of believers) and Dar Al-Kufr (a country of non-believers). Islam does not believe in the secular democracy but seeks the rule of Shariah law in all places.

The growth of Islam in western countries is mainly from immigration, a high birth rate and intermarriage (Muslim men deliberately marry western women). There are some converts but these are mainly in nations dominated by Islam and where taxation and intimidation bring forced conversions. Robinson presents some grim scenarios for the western world, although 9/11/2001 opened the eyes of the world to such threats.

After describing what is happening in the world with regard to Islam the author addresses the issue of why? He writes of the life of Mohammed, his marriage to the rich widow Kadijah (she was 40 and he 25) and later to at least 11 other women, including his adopted son's wife called Zainab. Mohammed came to hate idol worship and the wicked life that was prevalent among the tribes of Arabia. He came to believe there was just one God. He had contact with Jews and Christians (Nestorian) in this region. He had dreams and visions which he claimed were of the angel Gabriel who gave him words

to recite. He told people of these visions and managed to get a few close friends to believe he was a prophet. In the midst of tribal conflicts and by breaking treaties (in the name of Allah) he managed to grow more powerful and eventually take control of Mecca (and the Kaba), the city from which he had to flee when he first started preaching.

Robinson writes of how the Quran was developed over the years with Mohammed making new laws for each situation that he faced. For example the law of 'Mubah' or temporary marriage was proclaimed when his soldiers were away at war. 'According to this arrangement a Muslim was able to engage in sexual activity with a woman for a limited period of time after which she was paid a sum of money'. 'In later division over this issue Sunni Muslims claimed Mohammed subsequently prohibited the practice. But Shia Muslims, quoting Sura 4:24 claimed it was permissible' (p146). By special revelation Mohammed declared holy war or 'Jihad', and also the law allowing men (not including the prophet) up to four wives.

The facts and figures Robinson presents are disturbing but he reminds the reader that God is sovereign and that Muslims are men and women made in the image of God. They can be, and are being, reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ in powerful ways. Like most who document the conversion of Muslims he describes how many have visions which lead them to seek the Lord Jesus Christ. Robinson thinks that such phenomena are the result of much prayer. We do need to be reminded of course that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Faithful witnesses must take the gospel of Jesus Christ to these people as with any other people group. As difficult and as dangerous as this mission may be it is not as impossible task for the true God, as Robinson shows in describing various conversions.

The book ends with advice and even lesson plans on how to witness to Muslims. They have major problems with Jesus being the Son of God. They think of God the Father, Mary the Mother, and Jesus the Son. They are also told that the Bible has been corrupted and that Christians are obliged to eat pork and drink wine.

This book of 400 pages is easy to read and very informative. It is based on extensive research which is presented in unnecessary detail at some points. It well worth reading for the person who wants an up to date assessment of Islam from a Christian perspective.

- Dennis Muldoon

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[Continued from page 5] 'I joyed when to the house of God go up they said to me' (Psalm 122). The very simplicity of worship forms from a human viewpoint is in fact a pointer to its true glory in access into God's presence through Christ in the Spirit.

For the house of God today is not in Jerusalem in Palestine, nor is it a crowded room in a poor house in rural China, not the humble shelter in a refugee camp in north Africa, not the simple place of worship our fathers built for the convenience of the meeting of the church. The true scene of our worship is heaven itself where Christ is as our great High Priest and Saviour. There is nothing more

glorious than this, and the gold encrusted altar of the church of San Jose in Lisbon, or the soaring beauties of St Peter's Rome only draw our attention to the physical and earthly, and take us backwards.

A Jewish midrash on Psalm 91 says, 'He who prays in Jerusalem is as one who prays before the throne of glory; for there is the gate of heaven and the open door to the hearing of prayer.' It is a perceptive comment. It no longer applies to the Jerusalem in Palestine, but it does apply to the Jerusalem above, and to Jesus Christ, to worship that accesses the very courts of the heavenly temple through our great High Priest.

# NZ REFORMED CHURCHES SEND GREETINGS

From: Reinier Noppers - Delegate

## *Dear brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,*

It is my privilege to bring you greetings from your sister church 'across the ditch', the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. Let me say first of all that I am not a foreigner to your land, as I am first of all a SandGroper (Western Australian) and also spent several years in Victoria serving in a church just down the road from your Narre Warren congregation. So here I am, an Aussie representing a New Zealand church here at a Synod in Australia! And yes, although I am not much into rugby, the result of the recent Centenary Test did bring a smile to my face!

I would also like to say that I have deeply appreciated the warmth of your welcome and hospitality, and also for the privilege of speaking rights during your Synod. I look forward to getting to know you all a little better over the remainder of this week.

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand has been around now for just over 50 years, and we subscribe to the Westminster Confession along with the three 'Continental' confessions: the Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dordt and the Belgic Confession. Our membership stands at approximately 3400, which is spread across 19 churches and 2 preaching posts throughout NZ. One preaching post, that in Wanganui, has been going for quite some time, and the other, in Timaru, is seeking to recommence services after having been closed down for some time. Another group, made up of South African immigrants, decided to break ties with our denomination.

At this time we face similar problems to yourselves in terms of finding sufficient men for ministry within the churches, with five congregations currently vacant, and one seeking a second minister. Four men have been ordained into the ministry in the past three years. This situation does not look like improving in the near future, with a couple of serving ministers who are close to retirement age, one man commencing a vicariate in September 2008 from the USA, and only one man currently studying for the ministry who will complete his studies at the end of 2009. At this stage we have a total of 9 ministers with 3 or more years of experience!

However, despite this, local outreach remains a strong focus in many congregations, with efforts to reach the community through Language Assisted Bible Studies, teams going into the cities on the weekends to speak with those mingling there, beach missions and holiday clubs, and other "on the ground" activities.

As a denomination we also support several overseas missions, particularly with the Canadian Reformed Churches and Free Reformed Churches of Australia in Port Moresby where Wally & Jeannette Hagoort manage Mapang, a mis-

sionary guest house, along with other work in the local churches, and the start of a Reformed Churches Bible College to train local pastors. Another pastoral couple, Alan and Odette Douma, have also been called to work in Port Moresby on our behalf, and they plan to commence there in 2009.

Other missionary work includes the work of Janice Reid in Bali in Radio Training ministry, and several shorter term missions with both young and older folk to places like Mbale, Uganda; the Sudan, Ecuador, Myanmar, Mongolia and Tibet.

Our sister church relationships continue to be of great importance for us, and we are thankful that the Canadian Reformed Churches agreed to enter into sister-church relations with us at their last synod, held in May 2007. However, our discussions with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia have at this point reached an impasse, and we wait to see what will develop in this regard.

Our Synod in 2005 resolved to continue our sister church relationship with you, and to send a delegate to one of your Synods: which is of course why I stand before you today. May I encourage you also to return the favour, so that we may show you our hospitality and that you may get to know us a little better as well!

Lord willing, our next Synod will be held in Hastings in September of this year, with a number of committees presenting their reports. One Committee is in the process of selecting a range of Psalms and Hymns to be published in a "Book of Praise" for the use of the churches: the selections already made are available on

our Web site; another committee continues to look at the revision of our Liturgical Forms, Church Order and modern day language versions of the Westminster Confession of Faith; thirdly, as a result of overtures a committee was charged to consider the revisions of the NIV and NASB, along with the NKJV and the ESV as to their suitability as pulpit Bibles within our denomination; the committee recommendation is to stay with the NIV, along with the revised NASB, as neither the NKJV or ESV are considered an improvement upon what we currently have. Other committees are yet to complete their work.

Once again, I thank you for the opportunity to bring greetings, and to explain a little of what we have been up to in the past few years. My prayer for you is that you will remain strong in the Lord and in His mighty power, true to His Word as the Word of Life, and fruitful in the vine as you carry out the charge of the Great Commission in this land. Our prayer is also that our relationships will continue and improve to the glory of God, as we find ways to make this friendship more practical to the glory of God. May He continue to guide you, your ministries, and your congregations to the advance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.



## THE CHURCH ...



### MANNING INDUCTION

On 9 May last the Manning River Congregation rejoiced and gave thanks to God for the formal induction of Rev George Ball as our Pastor. The Moderator of Central Presbytery, Rev Sam Tamata conducted worship.

Rev Trevor Leggott spoke words of edification to the Congregation outlining its responsibility to the

new Pastor. His three headings were - 'Respect, Esteem and Sustain.' The Moderator addressed Rev Ball from the text, 'Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood' (Acts 20:28).

Following the induction service Mr. George Ball was formally welcomed to the Congregation by Mr. Neil Robinson. Mrs Ball, was welcomed by Mrs Wilma Robinson, who presented her with an orchid. Mr. Ron Jones then made a presentation to George and Rhoda of pictorial material relating to the Manning Valley. He also revealed that the Congregation had provided them with the funds to purchase for themselves a new refrigerator, washing machine and electric blanket.

George suitably responded and after prayer the large congregation retired to the hall for a delicious supper. We thank (Mrs) Norma Jones for the photograph of Rev. George Ball signing the Formula during the concluding portion of the worship.

### NARREWARREN CALL ACCEPTED

Rev Sjirk Bajema, BA, BD, BA (Hons) of Mangere Reformed Church, Auckland has advised his acceptance of the call extended by the Narre Warren Congregation. His induction is expected to take place at the end of 2008 or very early in 2009.

Mr Bajema's wife Betty-Ann is currently recuperating from a quite serious operation. She together with Sjirk and one or both of the Bajema's adult children (Eileen and Andrew) will comprise the manse family.

We are thankful to the Lord for this provision. Meantime the congregation is enjoying very satisfactory supply.

**[Continued from page 15]** Especially in their relationships with those over whom they hold some measure of authority, they should act in such a way as to put as little strain on that relationship as possible. Once again, the Bible has a direct instruction concerning this. Children are to honour their fathers and mothers, but those parents have a duty not to be so heavy handed in this relationship as to make it difficult for their children to give them due honour. Paul makes this point to both the church at Ephesus and to that at Colossae: "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." (Ephesians 6: 4) "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." (Colossians 3: 21) Parenthood, as with every other position of authority, lays the responsibility on us to make it as easy as possible for this fifth commandment to be kept by those who should honour us!

#### Equals

The section of 1 Peter from which I have taken a number of examples also tells us to "honour *all* people." Should we not see this as the logical final extension of the principle of the fifth commandment? We must honour our Father in heaven, and, because each human being bears something of His image and likeness upon them, we should honour them also. Regardless of how base they may be, or how much offence they may give us, we are to respect the image which they bear! We must, of course, remember that we should never allow our respect for others lead us to follow them into sin that would not be to honour them, but to dishonour both them and ourselves!

#### The Promise

This article has been rather long, but I do not want to conclude without mentioning the rider to this Commandment.

Paul calls it "the first commandment with promise," (Ephesians 6: 2), and I want to spend a few moments on that promise as we finish. Originally the promise would have referred to a long tenure of the Promised Land, to which the Israelites were being led by Moses. This can no longer be the application in the New Testament Church, yet the promise is stressed in the New Testament! It also cannot apply to a promise of a long tenure of the Christian land, Heaven, for that cannot be lost by any who receive it and it is an eternal tenure!

Should we not then be looking to the New Testament equivalent of the nation of Israel the Church? That Church will continue and we and our children may long enjoy its benefits – so long as we behave as those who have been brought into God's covenant should behave. When we fail to respect each other then the church will be in trouble. When we fail to honour those whom God has appointed to shepherd the flock of God, then that flock will be dispersed. When we fail to lead our children in the right ways or when we provoke them to throw off those ways by our lack of understanding then we are in danger of missing out on the promise of a stable Church. When our children fail to honour their Christian parents by following in their footsteps of faith, then that promise will fail and the life of our corporate community the Church will fail and die.

God's Church as an institution will never die but the part of it which we occupy may wither, and will wither, if we do not reverence His Word and keep His commandments including this Fifth one. May God grant us the grace to obey it in all its aspects and so to ensure that we and our children may live "long in the land which the Lord your God is giving you."

## The Fifth Commandment

Dr. W.J.W. Hanna, Brisbane, continues a study on the Ten Commandments. He deals now with the Fifth Commandment: Exodus 20:12- "*Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.*"

### Introduction

This commandment is generally considered to be the first of those which concern our relationships with our fellow men and women, rather than our relationship with God, yet it is doubtful if the matter is as clear cut as this. When we were discussing the fourth commandment we saw that, as well as directing us concerning our duty toward God in setting aside one day in the week for His service, it also had something to say about our duty toward other men and women and even toward our domestic animals. The one day of rest was appointed at the creation, so all of that creation had a right to enjoy its benefits even the non-human members of it! So, the fourth commandment is already crossing over the boundary between our duties toward God and our duties toward each other the fifth commandment continues that trend! At the same time, it does not leave aside our duty toward God altogether, for, if we have a duty to respect our human fathers, then we have an even greater duty to respect and to honour the Lord and Father of us all and the respect that we give to human parents who gave us birth should mirror the respect which we owe to the One who brought our whole race into existence.

Like the other commandments, this is a *moral law* and so is of everlasting force. This means that it is not something which merely dates from the establishment of the Jewish nation and is applicable only to them. The fact that it is one of the covenant laws for God's people does not mean that it applies *only* to them. It has always applied, ever since the creation, and it applies to all whom God created, whether they recognise His rights or not! This is something that we need to remember about these commandments. They are grouped together because they are all of a kind all moral eternal principles. They were all to be obeyed by Adam and Eve and they are all to be obeyed by men and women today. The fact that the vast majority of those men and women do not believe this makes not the slightest difference. It is not their wishes, desires or opinions which give these commandments validity it is the authority and sovereignty of God the Creator! We should remember this as we go on to examine the scope and applicability of the principles enshrined in the Fifth Commandment.

### Scope

Since we have established that the commandments are all *creation ordinances*, we can go back to the creation to see the setting in which this commandment first applied. Before the Fall of mankind into sin, the basic unit of human society was the family. God brought Adam and Eve into the world as individuals, certainly, but not as com-

pletely separate individuals. They were made for each other and they were placed together as part of the first human family. If they had not fallen into sin, they would, in due course, have been joined in the Garden by children, with whom they would have lived together in a state of sinless blessedness and harmony. Some people have seen in this institution of a number of people in one united family a reflection of the nature of God, who is Trinity in Unity an outworking of God's making mankind in His own image. Whatever we may think of this we can see that in such circumstances, since all would have been believers, the family would also have been the church and since all would have lived together in harmony, the family would also have been the state. To take the matter further, we can see that all relationships between human beings would have been based on the family. When mankind fell into sin, such relationships became marred by sin, and became separated from each other, so that we have now separate units of family, church and civil authorities. However, these, in their separate ways, are all based on the family model, and, since this is the case, the principle of the Fifth Commandment extends to them all. This fact has long been recognised and we can see many examples in Scripture of the outworking of the principle in other relationships. Some of these will be mentioned as we proceed.

### Honour

The commandment begins with the instruction to "honour." Now this is a term often used in the Bible, and as we examine the instances of its use, we will get some inkling of the scope of the commandment. To honour means to respect and to give due regard to the position or office held by that person. (We should remember that it is possible to honour a person even though we may disagree strongly with that person we may also honour the position which the person holds, even though he or she is a most unworthy holder of the office.) We find our Bibles telling us to honour those who are aged "You shall rise before the grey headed and honour the presence of an old man ..." (Leviticus 19: 32) We are also to honour those who have been widowed (1 Timothy 5: 3). We are to honour men and women generally and our rulers in particular "Honour all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king." (1 Peter 2: 17) Above and before everyone else we are to honour God and we have His promise that those who do so will be honoured by Him. (1 Samuel 2: 30)

### Fathers and Mothers

Seeing these different applications of "honour" may help us in considering the width which we should give to the phrase "father and mother" as it is used here. In the first place, we may fairly take the phrase to include, not only our natural parents, but also all those who stand to us in a parental relationship. This would include adoptive parents, step-parents and guardians. But, then, in view of the fact that Scripture tells us to honour the aged, should we not extend the meaning to cover all who are older than we, whether natural parents or not? Would not the princi-

ple of this commandment commit us to take care of such people, not treating them as burdens or as useless, but giving them all the dignity that we would like to see given to ourselves – not just providing the bare necessities, but enabling them to live with honour? It might be thought that children would never treat their parents – or any elderly person – in any other way, but experience teaches us that such behaviour is only too common and always has been. We might remember that Christ chose this very commandment to teach a lesson concerning how people can devise ways to avoid the implications of God's moral law. The Pharisees and scribes of His day had been teaching people that if a parent were in need of support and asked for something, the son or daughter had only to proclaim that he or she had dedicated to God whatever it was that the parent needed. This declaration cleared them of the necessity of providing for the parent while, at the same time, there was no necessity that the goods in question should ever actually be handed over to the Temple! The declaration itself was enough!

It is fairly obvious, also, from what we have said about human institutions mirroring the family unit, that we should also honour those who are placed above us in such institutions. We should give due honour and respect to the various officials of the Church and also of the state. In many such cases, those involved are in a position to enforce our obedience, but this is not the point! We should be prepared to give that honour anyway! Then, should we not take the principle still further, so that we give honour and respect to those who deserve such respect but who cannot enforce it, such as widows? God's word tells us that we should! Once we have got this far, we can see that there is a requirement to honour all people, so that we can look upon all men and women as being made in the image of God, and deserving of respect on that ground alone.

#### **Those under Authority**

Now, this has certainly extended the scope of the commandment! Since we are required to honour so many people, perhaps we should look for a time at what this will involve. Firstly, we can look at what it will involve for those who are placed in a position where they are under authority of some sort. This will include children, church members, people in the workplace and citizens in their relations with the state. A considerable amount of what I want to say here is also to be found in 1 Peter, from the eleventh verse of chapter 2 to the tenth verse of chapter 3. There we find that the central section of the letter outlined a principle of *submission* in the life of the believer. Christians are to be in submission to the civil authorities – even when the people who occupied these offices cannot be respected for their own sake. In verses 13 and 14 of chapter 2 we find these words: "Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and *for the praise of those who do good.*" The king, or

emperor, at that time was Nero, a cruel and evil man – yet he was to be honoured because of the office which he occupied. Verse 18 of the same chapter tells us that employees are to serve their employers with respect and when we consider that Peter's original commands were addressed mainly to slaves, we can see that this honour, also, was to be paid irrespective of whether it was deserved or not. This is actually stated explicitly in the passage. Wives, also, were to respect their husbands – and I am sure that there were just as many husbands in those days who did not earn that respect by the way in which they treated their wives as there are in our present age! The same sort of principles would also cover the case of Christians respecting and honouring the office-bearers of the Church. Those office-bearers often fail in their duties and they are always very poor representatives of the Lord whom they serve yet they are to be honoured for His sake.

Now, I have been making these points, not just to illustrate the scope of the commandment, but also so that what we learn from these examples may also be applied to the most direct example – the relationship between children and their parents. We hear a great deal today about the deficiencies of parents – and I have no doubt that many are deficient in various ways. We hear much about child abuse. It is dreadful to think that such things may happen – and they should be dealt with stringently when they do happen! However, the fact that our parents are not perfect does not give us a right to reject them completely except for some exceedingly serious offence. They are to be honoured for the position which they hold with respect to us – whether they honour the position or not! As with all the relationships mentioned, we should endeavour to honour and to obey wherever this is possible. However, there will always be times when such

***“ We hear a great deal today about the deficiencies of parents .... However, the fact that our parents are not perfect does not give us a right to reject them completely except for some exceedingly serious offence. They are to be honoured for the position which they hold with respect to us whether they honour the position or not! ”***

people make demands which are impossible for us to carry out and we must always remember that Christians are subject to a higher law. We must “obey God rather than men,” and when those who are in some position of authority demand that we do something which is dishonouring to God, then we ought to refuse, but we should do so while still honouring the position which they hold. As we grow up, too, we do not reach a stage where we can cast our parents off and need no longer give them respect and honour. We may honour them in a different way, but that honour should increase as it matures rather than diminishing.

#### **Those Exercising Authority**

I want to move on now to speak of the obligations which this commandment lays on those who are in positions of authority, whether they are parents of children, or whether they occupy one of the other positions to which I have applied the commandment. You may say that the commandment has nothing to say to such people – but I believe that it does! It may not give direct instructions, but it must surely be implied that those people who are to be honoured should endeavour to conduct themselves in such a way as to be worthy of that honour! **[To page 13]**

# BETWEEN YOU AND ME .....

It's quite a few years ago now since I suffered my first bout of a rare disease called "Synoditis". Since then it has occurred on average once every year. The symptoms are usually lethargy, exhaustion, exasperation and a general feeling of emptiness. At first I thought I was the only one who suffered from the disease, but I know of others who have also experienced it to a larger or lesser degree. The bad news is that there doesn't seem to be any antibiotics one can take to ward it off. The good news is that it usually doesn't last long, and one of the best cures for it is to focus on the mighty works of God, and the coming of his Kingdom. It's then that the too-ing and fro-ing of Synods gets put in its proper place in the grand scope of God's Plan and Purpose.

When I came home from Synod this time the text for my morning sermon was Micah 7:18-19.

*"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."* What wonderful words to think about after Synod! I introduced them by saying: "For some reason Church Meetings can be very frustrating and man centred. We become so focused on the immediate issues, and the arguments and discussions, that we can easily

lose sight of the bigger picture. And along with that comes a sense of failure - things that should have been said that weren't; things that were said that shouldn't have been, and things that were said very poorly. As the Bible reminds us, a person who can control their tongue is a perfect man and there's not many of those about! So it's good to turn away from all that and lift our eyes higher to our Incomparable God and especially his incomparableness in grace and mercy."



And then in the afternoon we thought about the words in Ephesians 1:9-10 - *"And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."* What a glorious administration has been set up in Christ! And what a wonderful

prospect lies before us when all things that are reconcilable shall be finally and fully headed up in Christ. At the end of the day, Heaven and Earth, God and Man, and Man and the Creation will be brought into a comprehensive unity!

With these two topics it's no wonder that Synoditis soon disappeared! What more could anyone want than to be completely forgiven, and be able to reflect on the grand scope of God's Plan and the glory of the work of Christ.

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The PCEA Handbook of Practice and Procedure first published in 1992 was last issued in 1999. It has now been updated to take account of decisions 1999-2008, and is available bound with the Decision Book of the Synod. The Decision Book includes decisions of on-going significance classified according to the Committee or body to which they relate. The total publication runs to 110 A4 pages, and the cost is \$20 postpaid per copy from the Convener, Rev Rowland S. Ward, 26 Roxburgh Road, Wantirna 3152. Cheques should be made payable to the PCEA.

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