

the presbyterian

September 2014



*Praise the LORD,
all his works everywhere in his dominion
Praise the LORD, O my soul,
Psalm 103:22*

banner

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Editorial

In some historical houses where famous people lived, they have kept everything exactly as it was when those people lived there. You can see what kind of kitchen utensils they had, the type of furniture they would sit on, the stables where they had their horses, and so on. But what is especially fascinating is going into the study of that person and seeing it precisely as it was the day he passed away. You can see what he was working on laid out on his desk, the novel he was reading for his entertainment there on the side, and going around that room you can see what really mattered in his life. Everything was left there just as it was the day he walked out of that office for the last time.

Now, how would it look if you were to die suddenly? What would we see in the study and office of your life? Is everything just as you would want to leave it? Are you happy to leave nothing unchanged?

They say death always catches you out. Even if you had been anticipating someone to die for some time, it is always a shock when it happens. In that sense it is unexpected. But as Christians we shouldn't be caught out, should we? Yet, that is the rub. We know there are things that would show us up in quite a different light if death came unexpectedly.

Let's deal with those things right now. Let's lay ourselves and all we are before the Lord. Let's pray. And then we must work to prove we are going God's way.

*Now, brothers, about times and dates
we do not need to write to you,
for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come
like a thief in the night.
1 Thessalonians 5:1-2*

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Your New Life!

The Believer's Hope in Revelation 21:1—7

Think of a jigsaw puzzle. You know, that puzzle beginning with hundreds or thousands of pieces that when all put together make up a beautiful picture. It is that puzzle which needs a lot of patience.

You particularly notice that as you work through the hard parts. Perhaps it's the blue sky, or a sea, or a lake. Those bits can take up a lot of time. And we can wonder then if it's worth doing!

But getting towards the end of the picture, we start to see it coming together. There aren't many pieces left. So as we see each gap, it becomes easier to find the piece that belongs there. As the last piece is fitted, we finally see the completed puzzle.

It All Comes Together

We see a similar pattern of everything coming together to bring comfort to the believer when we look at the first of the two aspects mentioned in Revelation 21:1-7. You see, just as it takes a while before we can see the completed puzzle, so it can be with the book of Revelation. There are some incredibly graphic scenes found here which could come out of the latest Hollywood blockbuster. But these scenes are hard to fit in together. We can even wonder sometimes if we've got pieces from the wrong puzzle!

There are passages in Revelation where we wonder what the Lord is doing in all this. What is with those strange beasts, the seven seals and angels and bowls, and the rider on the white horse? We can honestly wonder what those scenes have got to do with the Gospel. They just don't fit the picture. This is if we try to see it through our eyes, though. When we look at it as the Apostle John's original readers did, there should be no doubt. They were reared on

the colourful literature of the apocalyptic period of the inter-testamental period, and the events it covered were of recent origin. While those writings weren't part of Scripture, they do show us the kind of images and concepts that were so important in their lives.

But just as picturesque is what they had from before that time,

Revelation 21:1—7

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." 5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son."

because that is the Old Testament. The aspect of everything coming together in this passage is actually a description of Old Testament prophecy being fulfilled, in a very clear way. When we consider the Old Testament images of the salvation of God's people they involve the re-establishment of the intended relationship between

Sjirk Bajema

God, mankind, and the rest of creation. Sin had disrupted this perfect situation in the Garden of Eden. So paradise had been lost.

At that very same time, however, there was the message that one day paradise would be restored, spiritually and physically. That's the great theme throughout the Bible, from Genesis 3 on. That's why the English Poet John Milton's great work, *Paradise Lost*, had to be followed by *Paradise Restored*. Thus throughout the Old Testament you find these clear indications of that regeneration. Noah was able to survive through the ark he built at God's command. For Abraham and his Israelite descendants, the fruitful land of Canaan was like a new Garden of Eden for God's people. And in the books of the prophets it's pictured as a future state in which the full glory of God's kingdom will exist, yet in a physical environment. Why else would you find Isaiah prophesying in chapter 11, verse 6, of a time when, "the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them"?

That's the place to be! There salvation means everything is perfect. Sickness and grief and suffering are all gone. Righteousness rules!

Just as the puzzle is coming together, the imagery of the Old Testament is also becoming connected. For all this imagery of the new Jerusalem brings to mind the old Jerusalem, and how that became God's city. Because long ago it was David's city, and now one greater than David was here.

And So We're With Him Forever

This is why the aspect of everything coming together flows into a second aspect telling of how we are with the Lord forever. Now it makes sense. We will really be with him always.

Think back to when you finished the jigsaw puzzle. Boy, was it a hard one! But finally you've put that last piece in its place. Then what did you do? Think about it. Were you still focusing on how you got that last piece in? Not at all! Actually, weren't you just taking it all in? Now you were able to take a good look at the whole scene and see everything that was really in it!

Now, look through this passage from Revelation 21. Did you notice that it describes a whole picture? And when you look closely at it, what's really at the heart of it? Well, it's a picture of all these new things put together! There's a new heaven and a new earth – that's a whole **new** world! There's the new Jerusalem.

Yet where are our eyes drawn to? Ah, isn't it to the One sitting on the throne in verse 5? This person, who is the central focus of the picture, declares, "I am making everything **new**!"

So things as they are now are going to change. They cannot stay the same. In fact, this world is one that was always meant to go away.

Mind you, when we look around us, that's not the way many people live. They live as if this world is all there is. They're doing what they can for themselves now because they have no future. Now, they might have a kind of hope. They hope things turn out all right for them. They hope they'll get a good job, they hope they'll meet someone to live with, they hope they'll be able to have children, and they hope for lots more

things like that.

But at best that hope is chance. When you come round to asking them, they can't give you a reason why things should work out for them, unless it is because of their horoscopes, or their numbers – all of which is chance. And if they say they think they've been good enough, how do they know it is good enough?

The Christian's hope is that this world is in the true king's hands. The king who says, "I am making all things new," is the Lord Jesus Christ who is working everything

into heaven. There he is right now, making everything new. He who is the Alpha and the Omega – the beginning and the end – he alone can do it. And he is doing just that!

Now, the people that Jesus came for might not seem so extraordinary or remarkable. Yet it's precisely because of what they are in him that they are given a true hope. Because theirs is a hope that will be fulfilled! That's what faith in Jesus Christ brings. In fact, what these people have makes them

more than conquerors. As the apostle Paul says for all Christians in Romans 8, the verses 38 and 39, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." This is why another Apostle – Peter – can say of us in his first letter chapter 2, "you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a **people belonging to God**." And here we touch onto verse 3 of Revelation 21. Because that's what it's all about – "the dwelling of God is with men." The whole of the history of the covenant

and of our salvation lies behind this glorious affirmation. Every part of the hope of Israel – the covenant, redemption, the Promised Land, the Temple, Zion, the Davidic prince, and the new Eden – it's all here.

That's why verse 2 pictures Jerusalem as the bride. This is the ultimate relationship. This is God's only begotten Son, the second person of the triune godhead, joining himself with us.

As believers we are going to



*'Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse'
by Albrecht Durer*

out for his people. That's why he entered the life of planet earth. That's why he was born two thousand years ago. That's why he suffered here below. That's why he was crucified, died and buried. He was cut off from his Heavenly Father's loving presence exactly so that those who believe in him will come into that loving presence in heaven! That's why he arose victorious and ascended

be with our Lord! As indeed we already are. For even now we know what we have in him. We have fallen before him pleading his forgiveness for all our sin. We are those hungering and thirsting to please him in everything. We are those in verse 6 who have been given to drink.

This is why we know there is a new world. Because Jesus is right now in heaven making sure we get there. And all around his throne are those dear departed

saints, looking with him for that day. While they were here, in the further words of 1st Peter 2 verse 9, they declared the praises of him who called them out of darkness into his wonderful light. And now they live forever with him, a minute but essential part of his completed puzzle stretching like a living and glorious panorama throughout eternity.

This is the testimony a departed believer leaves his family and friends. His life was a shining

light proclaiming that it was the Lord himself who worked through him. But dear friend, is it the torch you carry in your life? Are you showing whose son or daughter you truly are? Can they see that this world is not yours at all? Do they know that when you pass away you will then be truly at home with Christ?

Religions under the Banner

Understanding Islam (1)

Rowland S. Ward

Islam is a major monotheistic religion which tradition says was founded in Arabia by Muhammad (570-632), whose name means Praiseworthy. Today it embraces about 20% of the world's population. Islam is believed by its followers to be the last and final revelation of God's teachings which began with the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament. Jesus Christ is seen as one of these prophets, although Muslims do not believe in his deity. Muslims believe that God chose Muhammad to be his last messenger to the world. In essence, Muhammad sought to emphasise the belief that there was only one God, Allah, an utterly mysterious being, all powerful and all merciful but absolutely free to do as he wills. The duty of an individual was to submit to the will of God, through organised religion.

Islam is divided into a number of sections. By far the largest is the Sunni ('well trodden path'), but around 150 million of followers, principally in Iran and Iraq, are Shi'a ('party [of Ali]') who regard Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, as the legitimate leader (or caliph) in the disputes over leadership following Muham-

mad's death in 632. The Shi'a are about one third of the population of the Middle East. The Holy Book of Islam is the Qur'an but books of tradition (hadith) related to the prophet Muhammad are also important. Properly understood it is believed that they enable a Muslim to live in every area of life according to God's will. Within both main streams are to found Sufi – mystical orders of Islam. There are also smaller syncretistic groups with Shi'a influences, such as the Ismailis, Druze, Alawites and Alevis whose theology is far different.

Founder

The word 'Islam' is Arabic for 'submission' and, in the religious context, submission to God's will and obedience to his laws. Islam is the correct name of the religion of the Muslims ('those who submit'). Muslims reject the name 'Muhammadan' because they do not worship Muhammad although he is regarded as the great example (sunna) for Muslims of how to live. The Qur'an contains little in the way of material to construct a life of Muhammad; his name appears only four times, and reliance must be had on various traditions (hadith) recorded apart

from the Qur'an. All Muslims regard Muhammad as God's Prophet, but estimates of him do vary somewhat. In popular folk-Islam (but not in the Qur'an) he is a miracle worker invested with supernatural powers, and might as well be divine such is the adulation given him. Others have varying degrees of scepticism about the value of the hadiths, which were collected up to a century after Muhammad's death, but all Muslims regard Muhammad as an example for living in one way or another.

The traditional account is along the following lines. Muhammad was born in Mecca in Arabia about AD 570. His father was Abdullah ('Servant of Allah', Allah being the pre-Islamic Arabic name for God akin to Hebrew 'Elohim'), but Muhammad was orphaned soon after his birth and raised by relatives. He accompanied an uncle on trading missions to Syria, then a Christian country, and in 595 married a wealthy widow, a merchant of Mecca named Khadija. It appears that the only one of their children who survived infancy was Fatima. Beginning about 609

and continuing for the rest of his life, Muhammad claimed to receive intermittent revelations from the angel Jibril (Gabriel). He began preaching in Mecca in 613. About 620 his wife died and he quickly remarried first Saudah, then A'isha, a six year old daughter of Abu Bakr, although the marriage was not consummated until she was nine, according to al-Bukhari, a leading authority. She was the favourite of the ten or more wives he was to take after Khadija's death.

Muhammad had to flee 250 kms to Medina in 622, the year from which Muslims date their calendar, because of opposition to his monotheistic message. For the next few years he was in constant warfare with the people of Mecca, but was also involved in many raids on other tribes. In 630 he gained control of Mecca. He died in 632 in Medina, having seemingly united the formerly polytheistic Arab tribes around him.

Scriptures

The revelations claimed by Muhammad are found in the Qur'an – a word most probably meaning 'recitation' or 'reading' – and are called suras (chapters). There are 114 suras making up some 120,000 words in English translation. Mostly they are not in chronological order but are arranged generally according to their length from longest to shortest (which is more or less the reverse of the chronological order). Many have little context to aid in interpretation. A sura may contain elements from several different periods, while later revelations may cancel earlier ones. So there are issues about interpretation that can be quite complex. Perhaps contrary to popular opinion the Qur'an does not include a requirement for Muslim women to wear the niqab or the burqa. This is a cultural

practice in only some Islamic communities. The Qur'an is accorded a uniquely divine origin in



a manner precluding a human element. It is regarded as a copy from a 'Tablet Preserved' in heaven, and thus even translation from the Arabic in which it is written cannot fully represent it. Given this view it is not open for a Muslim to engage in textual criticism such as Christians do to establish the correct text free from any errors in transmission while in any event most variant texts were deliberately destroyed. Tradition, as recorded by al-Bukhari, indicates that the Qur'an was not a complete book at the time of Muhammad's death, but particular portions were in written form and others recorded in the memory of Muhammad's Companions. Abu Bakr, the first community leader or caliph after Muhammad's death, sought to have everything collected. It is claimed that the actual text of the Qur'an was standardised by the third Caliph, Uthman, and variant texts were destroyed – although some questions remain.

The hadith ('tradition') is important in interpreting the Qur'an, and also an important source of Islamic law (sharia) since the Qur'an contains very little legislation suitable for the situation as it developed after Muhammad's death. The hadith comprises collections of sayings and deeds said to be of Muhammad by those who were close to him. In Sunni Islam six collections be-

came recognized, of which those by al-Bukhari (d. 870) and Muslim (d. 875) are regarded as the most authentic. Each contains 7,563 hadith (about 4,000 excluding duplicates) out of a claimed 600,000 al-Bukhari examined 200 years after Muhammad's death. The Shi'a have four different hadith books collected by three Persian scholars, since they consider many Sunni who passed on sayings were unreliable. The major hadith books of the Twelvers, by far the largest section of the Shi'a, are four,



and were collected by three Persian scholars, foremost among them al-Kulayni (d.941).

Different Schools

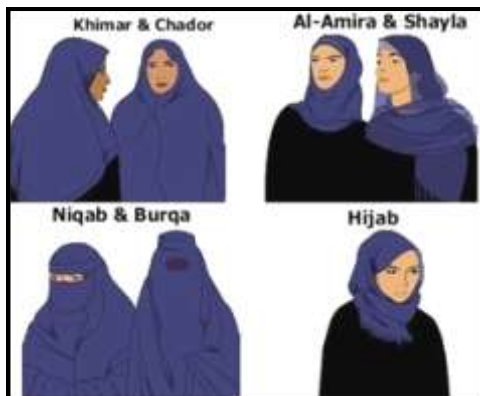
In Sunni Islam there are four schools of law, each of which have somewhat different approaches to the use and interpretation of the traditions, and there are also several theological traditions dating from the 10th century. The schools of law are named after the teachers concerned. Abu Hanifa (d. 767) is the most liberal and represents a majority of Sunni Muslims who generally follow the Maturidi theological tradition which emphasises free will and human reason alongside divine revelation. Malik bin Anas (d.795) gave more weight to precedents originating in Medina and is popular in Af-

rica. Shafi'i (d.820), whose system is official in Malaysia and Indonesia, represents about a third of Muslims. Most of these are Asharite in theological emphasis and so stress divine revelation above human reason and divine sovereignty over human free will. Ibn Hanbal (d.855) is more literalist than the other schools and is the smallest. It tends, like the Athari theological school, to insist on accepting the text of the Qur'an and hadith without theologising.

The strict Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia, founded by an ultra-conservative revivalist preacher named Muhammad ibn Abn al-Wahhab (1703-92), take this last kind of approach, and Saudi petrodollars have extended Wahhabi influence. There are similarities to the Salafis ('Ancestors'), who draw from all four schools of law and have some peculiarities of their own as they seek a return to the teachings of the Prophet and those from the earliest years of Islam as they perceive it. Not all Salafis advocate violent jihad ('struggle'), but a good number of such came from one or other Salafi faction. These include the Muslim Brotherhood founded in 1929; Hamas, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood founded in 1987; Al-Qaeda ('The Base'), founded by Osama bin Laden (d.

2011), and the Pakistan-originated Taliban ('Students'). These last two were founded about 1989, initially to fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan.

Authority for the Twelver Shi'a is represented by religious scholars with the title Ayatollah ('Sign of God'). The Usulis school has been the most prominent in this



branch of Islam since the 18th century. It does not assume all hadith are reliable and uses reasoning from the hadith and Qur'an to reach decisions applying to the different circumstances that may exist compared with early times. The minority Akhbari school reach verdicts professedly by direct reference to the Qur'an and hadith. Hezbollah ('Party of God') in Lebanon is a Shi'a advocate of violent jihad.

The apparently irreconcilable statements in the Qur'an, the va-

riety of traditions and the varying schools of interpretation, to which one must add the cultural accretions to Islam in particular localities, the impact of modernisers, and the fact that any Sunni Muslim can become an imam ('leader'), explode the claim of a monolithic Islam. These facts also explain how one Islamic group will claim Islam is a peaceful religion that condemns violence and killing (Sura 9.32), and another can say death, maiming or exile apply to those who oppose it (Sura 9.33). Happily, most Muslims want to live ordinary lives in peace with their neighbours, and in any case are often cultural Muslims, just as most professing Christians are cultural Christians. However, the rise of those who advocate shari'a and violent jihad as they seek to purify Islam by returning to the perceived teaching and practice of Muhammad and his immediate circle some 1300 years ago, is certainly making a significant impact given early Islam, unlike early Christianity, involved military conquest.

(To be continued)

Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

FAMILY CAMP

At Elanora Conference Centre, Elanora Heights, NSW

5pm Tuesday 30th December 2014—1pm Friday 2nd January 2015

Main Speaker: Rev. Andre Scheepers

The Gospel In Isaiah

Enjoy fellowship with other Christian families, be seriously challenged in your thinking and lifestyle

Afternoons free to relax—games, bushwalks, pool

Missions night Psalmody Good food Peaceful surrounds Children's programme

Brochures with further details are available now at your church

Please pray for God's help and blessing

The World in the Banner

Former Homosexuals Declare that Jesus Christ Can Change the Homosexual

Newly released documentary "Such Were Some of You" confronts the rising tide of popular opinion by chronicling the stories of Twenty-Nine former homosexual men and women who say that Jesus Christ has transformed their lives. Experts in psychology, (Dr. Julie Hamilton), biblical scholarship (Dr. Robert Gagnon) and ministry (Dr. Neil Anderson) add their voice to the claim that people have been leaving homosexuality for millennia.

Created to be used in Sunday School classes, support groups and other group settings, "Such Were Some of You" has been designed as a discipleship and equipping tool for the Body of Christ. The "witnesses to change" describe how they developed homosexual confusion, what the gay lifestyle was really like, how Jesus Christ set them free and the many ways that He has been healing and transforming their lives ever since. Participants include ex-gays from numerous ethnic backgrounds and age brackets, including one former gay activist who dramatically declares at one point, "I am free!"

This two-hour documentary is available on DVD in a "Regular Edition" and a "Leader's Edition" (which includes a Discussion Guide and a license to screen the video in group settings). For more information, go to:

www.SuchWereSomeOfYou.org and

www.PurePassionMedia.org.

Also available for screening in churches and conferences.

About "Mastering Life Ministries" – For twenty-seven years, Mastering Life Ministries has

been creating teaching resources for sexually bound and broken people as well as for the larger body of Christ that help them more redemptively minister to friends and loved ones. Our radio, TV, and video productions have garnered Angel, Covenant and Telly Awards. For further information, contact Dr. David Kyle Foster (producer) at MLifeM@aol.com or by calling 1-615-507-4166. For a Press Kit, or to interview Dr. David Kyle Foster, contact *Veritas Incorporated* at 719.275.7775.

+ *Mastering Life Ministries*

Iraq: Mosul Now Empty Of Christians

Formerly home to the highest concentration of Christians in Iraq, Mosul, the provincial capital of Nineveh, the ancient historic homeland of the Assyrian nation, is now devoid of Christians. As

'Nasrani' (the Arabic word for Christian), indicating that their homes were to be forfeit to the Islamic State. The fleeing Christians were met at checkpoints by ISIS militants who took their phones, passports, cash and jewellery – everything but the clothes on their backs. Most of the displaced Christians are now in Kurdistan, being cared for by local churches. The time has surely come for the West to share this burden of care. Western churches should start giving sacrificially to organisations that can get aid to displaced believers and the churches that care for them. Above all, PRAY. Meanwhile back in Mosul, ISIS is busy destroying the city's cultural heritage. On 4 July ISIS fighters dug up what is purported to be the tomb of Jonah. They also torched 11 of



The Arabic letter 'n' signifying Nazarene (Christian) on a Christian home in Mosul

the last Christians left, ISIS marked their homes with a large red Arabic letter 'n' for

the more than 35 churches and monasteries scattered through-

out the city, and demolished statues of literary and historic figures. Three Sunni clerics who tried to resist ISIS were executed. On 24 July ISIS militants returned to the Prophet Younis [Jonah] Mosque, and used explosives to complete the demolition.

Muslims who protested the bombing were arrested and summarily flogged. A pastor from Northern Iraq has reported (with photographic evidence) that eight young men were publicly beheaded last week after noon prayers; they had been accused of being apostate converts to Christianity. The eight heads were then suspended from an overhead power line. 'Please pray for us,' he said.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | RLPB 271 | Wed 30 Jul 2014

Albany, WA Free Reformed Church

Early in the morning on Friday the 18th of July, the Albany Congregation along with many others across the globe, were stunned to hear of the tragedy over Ukraine when Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 was knocked out of the sky and crashed. There were no survivors. Whilst most listened to this early morning news item with horror, news quickly filtered through that this was not something far away that had happened to people whom we did not know, this had happened to a well known and much loved and respected couple from our own midst – that the lives of Arjen and Yvonne Ryder had been snuffed out along with hundreds of others in a seemingly senseless act of terror. It was almost impossible to believe that this could be true! Countless messages of comfort and support went out to the 3 Ryder children, Robyn, Drew and Tiffany, as well as other family members, and the prayers of countless believers were sent up to God's throne, carrying their loss and pain to Him.

We believe that God's providence is real, that nothing happens by chance, that He guides and directs all events in history – also this tragedy. But for our human way of thinking, this was so hard to accept; this challenged us and tested us whether this belief was also real in the face of such an unspeakable tragedy that affected each and every one of us so personally.

How comforting and encouraging it was, then, to gather together around God's Word on the Sunday and to commence the worship service with those significant words: Our help is in the Name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

As Congregation we then sang, although for many of us it was through our tears:

What is in life and death my only aid

My comfort when I am by troubles swayed?

I am not mine but Christ's Who fully paid

For all my sins and saved me. ...

And verse 2:

My faithful Saviour keeps me in His care;

Without my Father's will cannot a hair

Fall from my head; He shall for me prepare

A heavenly habitation. ...

Reverend Alkema then proclaimed the riches of this confession based on Psalm 16 with this theme:

Faith's firm conviction: I will trust the Lord.

Setting God at my right hand.

Focussing on God's right hand.

The sermon concluded with these words: 'We come before the Lord at this time in sorrow and grief. We come looking for support and comfort. We come to hear what God has to say to us through His Word. What a blessing to be a child of God's – to have the gift of faith, the gift of salvation and the comfort of the Gospel. We may follow the voice of the Lord Jesus,

the Great Shepherd. Let us continually hold Him at our right hand, day after day, until one day He will take us unto Himself...'

A week later on Monday the 28th of July, a memorial service was held for the family of the couple. The Albany Free Reformed Church building had never held such a capacity crowd of family, Church family and friends as well as a large contingent of colleagues from Arjen's place of employment, the WA Department of Food and Agriculture. Rev Alkema again proclaimed a powerful testimony to our comfort and faith from the words of John 10:27-29: 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, Who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.'

Amongst others, speeches were made by both sides of the family as well as representatives from their places of employment which gave us insight into the many wonderful attributes with which God had blessed Arjen and Yvonne on this earth. The one overriding theme that came through was their love for their Saviour and His service, their thoughtfulness, their helpfulness and unconditional love for others, an example for us all to hold and to follow. May God continue to comfort and encourage their children and family members with His faithful love and care in the days, weeks, months and years that lie ahead when the absence of their loved ones will still bring pain and sorrow. They will be carried in the thoughts and prayers of many!

+ *GW van der Wal, Una Sancta*
9/8/14

Life under the Banner

The Wonder of Christ's Reign

Jim Klazinga

When you die, you will probably be remembered by relatives and friends for a number of years. You may even be one of those few persons spoken of for a few hundred years, if your accomplishments were worthy enough.

But your immediate influence over the course of history will cease when you die. Your ideas may live on, but you will not have any control over what other people will do with those ideas.

When Mohammed died, he ceased to have control over the direction of the Islamic faith. When Hitler died, he could no longer direct the activities of the German army.

When Robin Williams recently died, he could no longer be involved in entertainment. His acting work still lives on in video recordings. But he will no longer be producing any new material, and he has no control over what is done with his old material.

Now, if we were to think of Jesus as being like Mohammed or Robin Williams in this way, we would be seriously mistaken.

Continuing Control

Many like to think of Jesus as someone who may have had some good ideas; but he is no longer around and has no control over what people do with his teachings.

But Jesus Christ was unlike any other man that has ever existed. He was and is the eternal Son of God. And as such, he continues to have direct control over history.

Unlike Hitler, Jesus still controls the army he left behind, even now in the 21st century. Unlike Robin Williams, Jesus' life work did not stop. And unlike Mohammed, Jesus did not give up direct control of the religious movement that he started.

Jesus not only rose from the dead, he not only ascended into heaven, but he is at this very mo-

ment seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. He is at this very moment living in heaven as Lord over all.

That is why this man, who spent all of his brief earthly life confined within a relatively small area on the other side of the globe, continues to be relevant today in Australia, and everywhere else on earth.

Complete Control

How far does Jesus' influence extend? As Ephesians 1:22 says, "And he [God the Father] put all things under his [Christ's] feet and gave him as head over all things to the church."

All things. Jesus has control over everything. He is the absolute King.

And notice, we are not just talking about the future here, but the present. We are not saying that Jesus is going to be the absolute ruler over everything, just as soon as he comes back and gets rid of all sin and death. No, he is Lord even now. He is in control even now.

Even now, in the midst of all the suffering that goes on in the world, in the midst of all the strife and sinning, Jesus Christ is absolute King. This is the present reality. This is the most ultimate reality in the entire universe.

What is going to happen in the future is that his Lordship will be recognized by everyone and everything. When he returns, every eye will see Jesus as he is: the one absolute Lord.

But again, we must stress that right now Jesus has the authority to be the King over creation. At this point in time he has the right to rule as the one who gained the victory over sin. He has the power given to him by the Father to have control over the whole universe.

Nothing is out of his jurisdiction. You don't need a passport to enter the territory of another King, be-

cause there is no place in the universe outside of his control. God put all things under his feet.

Control of the Church

There is one aspect of that Lordship over the universe that especially stands out. Ephesians 5:23 draws attention to it: "Christ is the head of the church, his body."

Christ is Lord over the weather. Christ controls the nations of the world. Christ controls all the stars and all the planets. But all of this is secondary to Jesus being head of the church.

Now hold on a minute! Wouldn't that be over-estimating the importance of the church? By saying that we first think of Christ as head of the church, aren't we in effect tooting our own horn?

Not really. It's not about us, but it's about Him.

Ephesians 1:23 describes the church in two ways. It says that the church is the body of Christ, and it says that the church is the fullness of Christ.

The church is the body through which Christ works out his purposes here on earth. The church is the hands by which Christ toils in this world. The church is Christ's feet, which travel all across the globe to bring the good news of the gospel. The church is the mouthpiece through which the gospel is proclaimed. The church is what the world is going to see when it sees the salvation activities of our Lord. We are the ones who have the Word of God. We are the ones who are called to live out that Word of God. We are the body of Christ.

And the church is the fullness of Christ. The church is that which manifests the fullness of Christ here on this earth. The church is that body which is filled with Christ, filled with his power.

Think of a police officer. He has a special role given to him by the government. As an agent of the government, he is given the power of the state, and sometimes he is called to use that power. You might say that he is partially the fullness of the government manifested out on the street.

This analogy falls short, but still, in a similar sense, you could say that the church is the fullness of Christ. The church as the people of God is filled with the power of Jesus and it is called to demonstrate that power and use that power.

Do you see why Christ being the head of the church is so important? The church is the agent through which Christ works out his purposes for history. Christ uses the church and dwells within it and gives it power in order to further his plans. In other words, Christ demonstrates his Lordship over all things by being Lord over the church and using it to be the agent through which he works. Christ shows that he is Lord over all by being Lord over the church.

Control For the Church

Quoting Ephesians 1:22 again: "[God the Father] gave him as head over all things to the church." In the original Greek, the grammar of the words "to the church" can suggest the idea that Christ is Lord over all things for the advantage of the church. Christ is Lord over the universe for the sake of his people.

Christ is Lord over the universe for the sake of you and me, for all who belong to God's people. As Romans 8:28 puts it, we know that in everything God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Jesus works for the good of those who have been saved by grace through faith, and who look forward to when he shall return and take them home.

When you think about it, the implications of this fact are rather overwhelming. If Christ is Lord over all for the sake of the church,

then it follows that everything that goes on in the universe goes on for the sake of the church.

Think about this: everything going on around has the purpose of serving the good of the people of God. The universe continues to run for our sake. It is because of the Christian church that Christ continues to work in history.

Have you ever thought of going up to your local member of parliament and saying, "The only reason the nation of Australia continues to exist is because God is working for the good of those who belong to him"?

Have you ever thought of going to the United Nations and declaring to all the world that the only reason humanity still exists is because Jesus is working on behalf of his people?

Sounds rather impressive, doesn't it? We might almost get big heads thinking about how important we are. Hey, we Christians, we're the reason why this world hasn't destroyed itself. It's because of us that God lets the world continue going.

Of course, swelled heads should not be the result of knowing that Christ rules for the sake of his church. In the midst of all this, we must remember that God is not working for our good because we are worth it in and of ourselves. And he is certainly not working for our good because we are any better than those who are not Christians. But he is working for our good solely because of the love and grace that he bestows on us without our deserving. And we are here solely for the purpose of giving honor and glory to him. So ultimately, you have to say that Christ is Lord of the universe for the good of the people of God, in order that God may be praised. All glory be to him!

Comforting Control

It's very assuring to know that Christ as Lord is working in and through us, and for us. We know that ultimately, nothing can take us

away from God's love in Christ, because Christ is in charge, and he's working for our good. Christ will defend us and keep us safe from all enemies. The devil is out there prowling like a lion, just waiting to devour us, but Jesus is Lord, and so he protects us. He keeps us. What incredible joy and confidence this inspires in us, to know that we are safe, because Christ is in charge, not the devil. Jesus is Lord. He is King. And this king protects his servants.

You know, the apostle Paul in Ephesians 1 prays that the Ephesians may know the glorious hope that belongs to the people of God, the hope that can come because of the immeasurable greatness of the power of the Lord. That is the hope that can belong to us as well. We can have hope and assurance because we know how great is the power of the God whom we serve. We have comfort because we know that Jesus is not just in heaven passively watching what is going on here on earth, but using his power as Lord of all creation for the good of his children. You and I, as God's people, have that comfort.

We might not always understand how this all works. When we hear of the persecution of Christians and the advancement of evil, we wonder how this could be consistent with Jesus being Lord. How is what's happening lately to Christians in Iraq for the good of the church? We might sometimes think that we have a better idea as to what would be best for God's people.

But, ultimately, we trust that it is Jesus who is in charge. And he sees the big picture in a way that we never could. He will continue God's plans, and he will work out God's promises. He will continue to work through us and for us, for God's ultimate glory.

Children under the Banner

From: 'Search and Solve: Bible Activity Sheet',
by Betty De Vries,
[Illustrated by Donna Greenlee]
Baker Books, 1998

A Wicked Person

goes about with a corrupt _____



winks with his _____



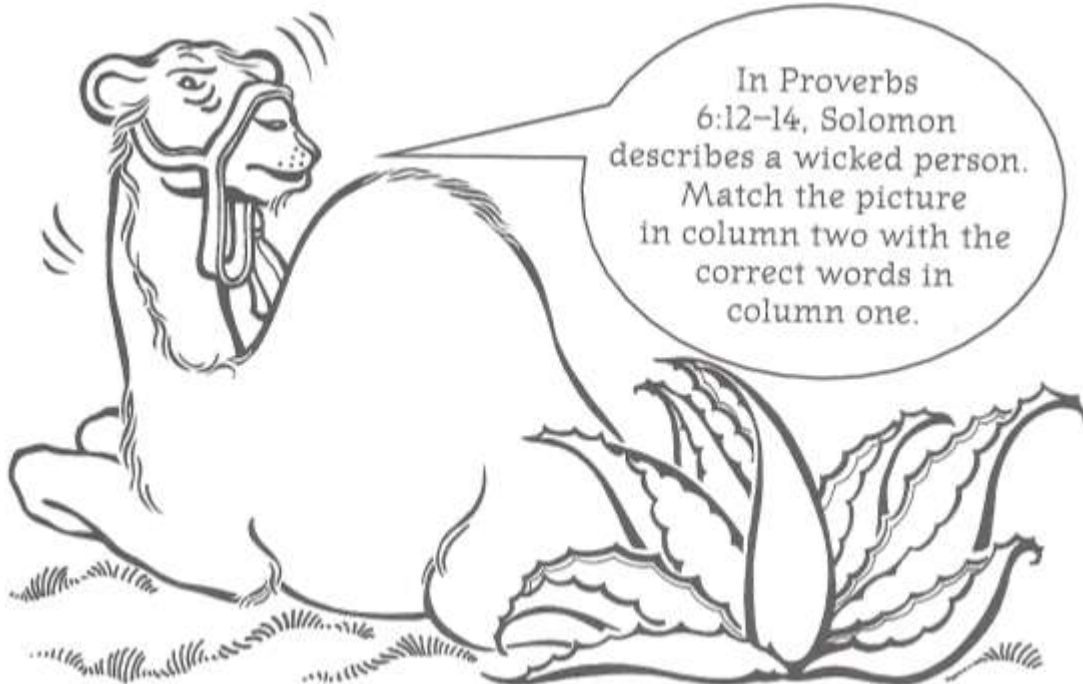
signals with his _____



plots evil with deceit in his _____



motions with his _____



Prescribed Search Work

SEPTEMBER 2014

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

SENIOR AND INTERMEDIATE (Intermediate omit questions 1 and 2)

ESTHER chapter 1

1. On the seventh day of king Ahasuerus' feast what did he command the queen to do? What was her response? (3 verses)
2. What was the royal decree concerning Vashti?

chapter 2

3. Who was Mordecai and whom had he brought up as his daughter? (3 verses)
4. What did Hegai do for Esther because she pleased him?
5. Whom did the king make queen instead of Vashti?
6. What had Mordecai done in the matter of Bigthan and Teresh? (2 verses)

chapter 3

7. How did Haman feel when Mordecai did not do him reverence [pay him homage]? Whom did Haman then plan to destroy? (2 verses)
8. When the command to destroy the Jews was published, what was the feeling in the city of Susshan?

JUNIOR

1 SAMUEL chapter 24

1. How did David feel after he had cut off the skirt [a corner] of Saul's robe in the cave? (2 verses)
2. After David's words had made him weep, what did Saul say? (1 verse only)

chapter 26

3. While Saul was asleep in the trench [within the camp] what did David take from beside his head?
4. Write out the verse where Saul tells David that he had sinned.

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: [ies-
 teel@gmail.com](mailto:ies-teel@gmail.com)

Books in the Banner

The Church by Edmund P. Clowney

Reviewed by Herm Zandman

Professor Clowney (1917-2005) was pastor in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the USA and the Presbyterian Church USA respectively, and taught practical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary. From 1966 until 1982 he was also President of this well-known theological training centre. He has written copiously; the book under review was published in 1995.

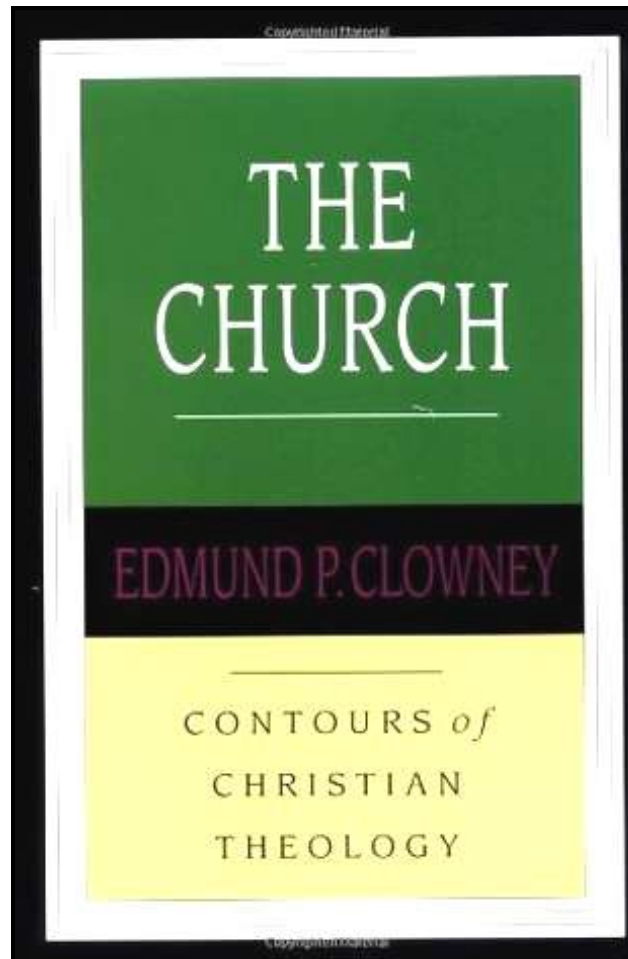
When people think of The Church, their thoughts are often associated with dullness, irrelevance, and a place where the older generation finds company. Yet, Biblically the Church is the Body of Christ, both invisible and visible, it is the household of God. Professor Clowney has left Christendom with a valuable legacy as he addressed the phenomenon called 'Church' in its many facets, manifestations, historical continuity, societal and cultural placement, and confessional physiognomy.

The Church is the people of God called out of darkness into light. As Christ's Body, says Clowney, it can show the world an ethical integrity it [the world] must respect. Furthermore, the need of the secular world is greatest at the very points where its criticism of the Church is most intent. The fact that the Church, in the words of Martin Luther, is rent asunder by schisms despite the prayer of the Lord 'that they all may be one as We are One' (John 17) has hampered the Church in terms of its societal credibility and outreach effectiveness. The book traces historical efforts at achieving unity

at mondial level and the resultant outcomes of such efforts, such as work by world councils and the Vatican. Much is made of the forces that play out in striving to effect unity among believers, but the author does not consider the pruning process (cf. Romans 11) which is also an inevitable historical given as believers strive to return to the Apostolic foundation time and again when a Church is subjected to backsliding. More stress could (and should) have been placed on the fact that real unity of the Body of Christ is only and exclusively to be set in the

ity – or universality – is to be understood in the way the Reformers formulated its definition, i.e. worldwide unity in Christ, rather than topographical existence of churches as understood by the Roman Catholic Church. Clowney is to be commended for the depth of historical background study on this particular aspect of the Church.

There are two points here that warrant alert, critical thinking on the part of the reader. These are points that have historically been issues of debate, controversy even. The first one is the point where Jesus asks His disciples a pertinent question (Matthew 6:13-18): When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Clowney says that Jesus made the confessing Peter a rock of foundation in His Church. The commonly held Reformed view is that not Peter (as the Roman Catholic Church holds), but rather the confession



Truth of the Scriptures. Fascinating in that context is the treatise by Clowney on the historical battle pertaining to the word 'catholic' in the Apostles' Creed. Catholic-

Peter made was the foundation of the Church, 'for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ' (1 Corinthians 3:11). Clearly, the Apostles are important to the Church, but they are not the foundation. Revelation 21:14 declares that the wall of the city had twelve foundations and in them the twelve names of the Apostles of the Lamb. They, the Apostles, were foundational, but they were essential to the superstructure, to what was built on top of the bedrock foundation that was Jesus Christ.

The second point of historical controversy pertains to the offices of the Church. What is the place of women in the context? Clowney rightly demonstrates ably that the Church is organised along the same lines as the created fam-

ily as regards its economical structure. Ontologically, in essence, all members are equal in God's plan, but as to function there are differences. In the book it is made clear that women are, based on the aforesaid premise, not to exercise authority in the Church. As such, for instance, they are not to occupy the office of elder. However, when it comes to the office of deacon, the author makes the case that the female deacon is biblically justified. He grounds his argument in Romans 16:1-2 (where Phoebe is presented as one who engages in diaconal work) and 1 Timothy 3:11. To this reviewer the case is made more on the basis of eisegesis than exegesis of Scripture, i.e. it is more a case of reading in to Scripture, drawing unwarranted conclu-

sions, than explaining Scripture, drawing clear and unequivocal instructions.

Overall, the book is a very worthwhile read, thoroughly researched, and providing valuable insights and clarifying background to the multi-faceted apple of the Lord's eye (cf. Deuteronomy 32:10).

Title: The Church
Edmund P. Clowney
Series: Contours of Christian Theology
Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois

Dr Herm J. G. Zandman has a PhD in Theology (Ethics), not Christian Education as stated in last month's Banner

The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

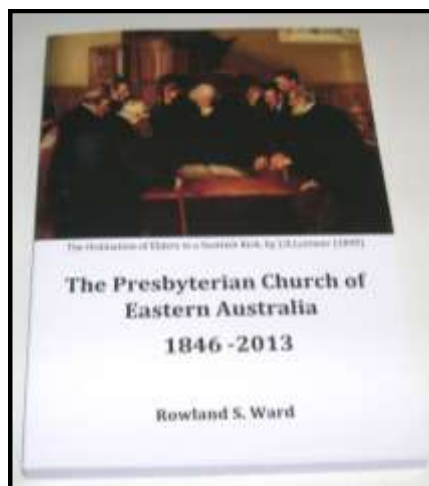
by Rowland S. Ward

Here is one author known to the readers of *The Presbyterian Banner*. Indeed, it was in the pages of *The Banner* that much of the material in this book first made its appearance.

This book is an introduction to the PCEA touching on a number of areas in the doctrine and life of the denomination. It does not avoid some of the difficult times in the history of our churches and acknowledges times when positions were not so clearly enunciated. But it does show us a line of faithful believers who sought to adhere to biblical principles – a line which has come down to us today.

It is interesting to note that this perseverance meant that our domination in earlier days had to do without any corresponding sister churches overseas at times – at one stage even the Free Church of Scotland did not officially recognize us. We can be most thankful for how the Lord has worked through our history to bring us to where we are today –

though not a large denomination, yet one that has continued to have a biblical influence in this land, has a number of key sister-churches and interaction with biblically-based mission organisations.



While the book is well set out and illustrated, it is not one I would recommend being given to Christian friends from non-reformed denominations or visitors to our churches. That would need a more basic introduction updating the booklets that have

been published in the past.

I was disappointed that in Chapter 11 regarding 'Youth' more attention wasn't paid to the responsibility of parents to bring up their children in the true biblical faith – instead there was fault inferred to the denomination for a significant number of the youth falling away in their teenage years.

The author's criticism in the same chapter of "a simplistic fundamentalism" in regards to a particular response to the challenge of evolutionary teaching was also a vague and unhelpful comment.

For those familiar with our position this is a helpful resource, and one that is priced reasonably.

Published by New Melbourne Press, 2014, and available for \$10 plus postage from the author:

26 Roxburgh Road,
Wantirna 3152, Australia.

Reviewed by Sjirk Bajema

Churches in the Banner

Ulverstone Car Rally

Nine teams, 32 people, participated in the Ulverstone Winter car rally, organised by last years winners, Peter Otten, Tiani and Andrew Pilgrim.

The weather was kind to us, and we were able to see God's creation in all its glory.

The team called 'The magnificent seven' were this year's winners, and will therefore be responsible to organise next year's rally.



'The Magnificent Seven' - Ulverstone Winter Car Rally Winners

Ulverstone Ladies' Pampering Day

Relaxation music and fragrant oil set the mood for our special treat for the ladies who attended our Pampering Day. Barista Kristina Bosveld made beautiful cof-



Barista Kristina Bosveld

massages. We all went home feeling relaxed and happy, having enjoyed each others company as well as being spoilt. What a treat.

Next month we will be sewing ladies' skirts for the A.I.M. mission, and finishing off other projects.

Please continue to pray that this small start will grow and reach out to others



Ulverstone Ladies Being Pampered

fee and her special Apple Cinnamon cake which we all enjoyed while being spoilt with foot baths and scrubs, hands, feet and neck

in the community.

We would love to hear what our other churches are doing, so please share your ideas with us,

we are all so far away it would be great to see what you are endeavouring to do in reaching people in your area.

Was this space for your church news and photographs?

Ask your minister or elder how your congregation can be part of this positive promotion of the denomination, as well as keeping the rest of us up with what's happening!

Camps, special events, youth news, seniors, engagements, marriages, births, anniversaries, obituaries... the list goes on and on!

Perhaps you could volunteer to send in some news and photos?