

The Presbyterian Banner

March 2018

Identity





FROM THE EDITOR

Having edited the PCEA magazine from 1981-87, briefly in 1996 and again from 2000 to

2006, I little thought the task would come again to me. With the Rev. Sjirk Bajema accepting a call to New Zealand, a fill-in was necessary until Synod reviews the matter. I want to record here the Church's thanks to Sjirk for his efficient work as Editor from the issue of February 2010. The magazine was always out on time and was given a more modern appearance with particularly attractive full-colour covers. I'm afraid my technical ability is more limited. I would have preferred to retain the previous layout for the present but there is a steep learning curve for me if I was to use the same programme to set up the magazine. Also there would have been some expense to adapt my MacBook equipment to run it. Given I preach most weeks and have a reasonably heavy schedule otherwise, I'm afraid readers will have to be content with the format I've been able to work up.

Editing is an interesting but somewhat unenviable task, since you cop criticism for your editorial choices. One learns of course,

and hopefully becomes wiser. For me, *The Presbyterian Banner* is an important means of communication between our scattered churches as well as a way to minister to spiritual needs as well as advocate our position, challenge and stimulate. So I aim for a devotional piece in each issue as well as articles that fit the description just given. I have written each of our ministers requesting material as well as news items, and I hope I receive more than I can use.

We are not a Church that reads as much as we did in 1981. Ours is a more visual world with its advantages and disadvantages. Ours is also a fast-changing world, not only in technology but in social attitudes. Terrorist threats have replaced Communism as the perceived danger to our way of life, but the reality is rather different with secularism rampant and striking at the vitals of Christian foundations in the West. Decline in Christian commitment in Australia has continued apace and would be far worse without the positive contribution of many new settlers.

What 2018 will bring is not ours to know. However, we have no call to be complacent or despondent. Let us resolve to reassess our priorities, and recommit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in reality not merely in words. #

Cover pic credit:

Stewart Loudon, Narre Warren

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Editor (pro tem): Rev. Dr Rowland S. Ward, 2 Hadlow Drive, Wantirna 3152

T: 03 9720 4871 M: 0421 823 231 E: rowland.ward@gmail.com

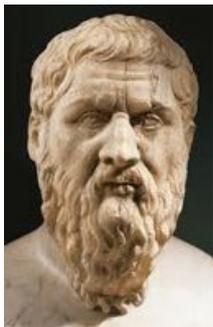
DARK DAYS & DARKEST HOUR (1)

STORIES – VERBAL AND VISUAL

The recent scandals impacting acting and the film industry are a reminder of the hazards endemic in this area and challenge our attitude to film and theatre going. Historically, Reformed and Presbyterian Christians placed large question marks over dancing, card-playing and the theatre.

Our Larger Catechism 139 rightly forbids among other things ‘*lascivious* songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays’. *Dancings* does not exclude all dancing but rather that which reveals or excites sexual desire. That pretty well rules out the nightclub for Christians, but it doesn’t ban everything. For example, Scottish country dancing would not usually fall under condemnation. The dancing mentioned in Luke 15:25 was usual at Jewish weddings with the men and women dancing separately. Card-playing came to Europe in the 1370s and its social context, including gambling, perhaps more than the thing itself, incurred Christian criticism, again as is the case today. Some thought that as card-playing involved chance it was opposed to God’s providential care over all, but this is hardly correct (Proverbs 16:33).

Objection to the theatre was more principled. Plato (427-347 BC) [pictured] had thought the



theatre of somewhat doubtful value and likely to bring the end to a serious engagement with life since observers would imitate what they saw. For Christians it was this and more. It was enough coping with one’s own sins let alone acting out someone else’s life, and was it right

to be entertained by such? By logical extension the objection also was applied to novel reading, especially in circles influenced by pietism in the 18th century.

We shouldn’t be too quick to dismiss these concerns. They touch on important matters. Christians are citizens of a heavenly country. They are to shine as lights in a dark world, so going along with prevailing standards in society is often inconsistent with the Christian’s acknowledgement of the Lordship of Christ.

Both we and our children need to recognise that and act accordingly, costly as it may be to do so.

Can a Christian be an actor or write fiction? Certainly the Bible itself gives accounts of harrowing evil that defies, yet necessarily engages, the imagination. Those who write, whether fact or fiction, and those who act, are telling a story. The motivation of the verbal or visual story is vital and great care in the execution. Of course, the ethical danger of repeatedly acting out the life of an evil person is real, and in that sense a film rather than a live performance is less hazardous for the actor. And there is no necessity to be so realistic that the person’s sins are repeated or imitation encouraged.

We also need to question much of the current film and television industry in that this medium is not a matter of mere entertainment. There is always a message, whether in sci-fi movies or Jane Austen. The way in which we in the West have become dominated by this medium considered as entertainment can do great damage. We need discrimination. Actors need discrimination and not just on lascivious content. One applauds the speaking up about sexual abuse and harassment in the acting profession. But when so much in the industry plays up to what is lascivious, why is anyone surprised? And the hypocrisy of much of the media is stunning.

For the record, my wife and I took one of our grandsons to see *Darkest Hour*. Apart from a gratuitous unhistorical ride by Churchill on the London Underground to sample popular opinion, and virtually ignoring the remarkable providence that enabled the evacuation from Dunkirk, this was a worthwhile film about a very flawed human. Churchill rejected the deity of Christ in his 20s and was a materialist, though tolerant and not averse to using religious language. ‘I could hardly be called a pillar of the Church,’ Churchill once said. ‘I am more in the nature of a buttress for I support it from the outside.’ Yet, *Darkest Hour* was a film that both engaged and challenged me as to the complexity of the human condition, the gifts of God even to those who reject him, and the ultimate answer in the redemptive work of Christ. RSW



DARK DAYS & DARKEST HOUR (2)

The Gospel for a sin-sick world

Here is part of the powerful victim impact statement of Rachel Denhollander in the recent case of Larry Nasser who, over many years, abused hundreds of young women under the guise of therapy. They were dark days – years in fact – for many victims. Is there forgiveness? Yes, there is grace to those who accept God’s judgment ...but if not, the Darkest Hour.

My advocacy for sexual assault victims, something I cherished, cost me my church and our closest friends three weeks before I filed my police report. I was left alone and isolated. And far worse, it was impacted because when I came out, my sexual assault was wielded like a weapon against me.

Often by those who should have been the first to support and help, and I couldn't even do what I loved best, which was to reach out to others. I was subjected to lies and attacks on my character including very publicly by attorney Shannon Smith when I testified under oath.

I was being attacked for wanting fame and attention, for making up a story to try to get money. Your Honour, since these attacks were made on my character very publicly on public record, I would like to take an opportunity briefly now to correct them. ... Out of the two women in question that day, Ms. Smith and I, who were attempting to communicate through either questions or answers, I would like to note that only one of us was taking pictures of the courtroom on her cell phone. Only one of us posed for the press and said, quote, ‘I feel like I should say cheese’. And out of the two of us, only one of us was making money off her court appearance that day. I don't feel the need to say anything else. I think I've communicated completely.

... The cost, emotional and physical, to see this through has been greater than many would ever know. And Larry, I don't need to tell you what the cost of your abuse has been to me because you got to read my journals, every word of them. Because those had to go into evidence to make this happen.

I want you to understand why I made this choice knowing full well what it was going to cost to get here and with very little hope of ever succeeding. I did it because it was right. No matter the cost, it was right. And the farthest I can run from what you have become is to daily choose what is right instead of what I want.

You have become a man ruled by selfish and perverted desires, a man defined by his daily

choices repeatedly to feed that selfishness and perversion. You chose to pursue your wickedness no matter what it cost others and the opposite of what you have done is for me to choose to love sacrificially, no matter what it costs me.

In our early hearings, you brought your Bible into the courtroom and you have spoken of praying for forgiveness. And so it is on that basis that I appeal to you. If you have read the Bible you carry, you know the definition of sacrificial love portrayed is of God himself loving so sacrificially that he gave up everything to pay a penalty for the sin he did not commit. By his grace, I, too, choose to love this way.

You spoke of praying for forgiveness. But Larry, if you have read the Bible you carry, you know forgiveness does not come from doing good things, as if good deeds can erase what you have done. It comes from repentance which requires facing and acknowledging the truth about what you have done in all of its utter depravity and horror without mitigation, without excuse, without acting as if good deeds can erase what you have seen this courtroom today.

If the Bible you carry says it is better for a stone to be thrown around your neck and you be thrown into a lake than for you to make even one child stumble. And you have damaged hundreds.

The Bible you speak of carries a final judgment where all of God's wrath and eternal terror is poured out on men like you. Should you ever reach the point of truly facing what you have done, the guilt will be crushing. And that is what makes the gospel of Christ so sweet. Because it extends grace and hope and mercy where none should be found. And it will be there for you.

I pray you experience the soul crushing weight of guilt so you may someday experience true repentance and true forgiveness from God, which you need far more than forgiveness from me -- though I extend that to you as well.

Throughout this process, I have clung to a quote by C.S. Lewis, where he says, my argument against God was that the universe seems so cruel and unjust. But how did I get this idea of just, unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he first has some idea of straight. What was I comparing the universe to when I called it unjust?

Larry, I can call what you did evil and wicked because it was. And I know it was evil and wicked because the straight line exists. The straight line is not measured based on your perception or anyone else's perception, and this means I can speak the truth about my abuse without minimization or mitigation. And I can call it evil because I know what goodness is. And this is why I pity you. Because when a person loses the ability to define good and evil, when they cannot define evil, they can no longer define and enjoy what is truly good.#

Middle East Reformed Fellowship



Pioneer missionaries focused first on learning the languages of the peoples to whom they were called to proclaim the gospel. In Muslim lands, with astute foresight, in the mid-19th century the Scriptures were translated into Arabic and Farsi. Later the Bible was made available in Urdu, Turkish, Somali, Oromo and a good number of smaller languages. Bible translation efforts of Evangelical/ Reformed missions were meaningful and productive as they partnered with well-qualified locals. Amazingly, some pioneer missionaries excelled in these languages. We are often driven to give thanks when singing superb Arabic psalms and hymns rendered by those men.

Nurturing by Print

In that era, Western colonial control of all Muslim lands stretching from North Africa across the Mediterranean all the way to Indonesia in the Far East, provided missionaries freedom to share the gospel. Later, in God's providence, when missionaries were no longer allowed

that freedom, their faithful testimony left behind local churches and believers, illustrating "all things work together for good." Alongside God's word, study books and other materials in the languages of the people had enabled spiritual leaders to be trained – pastors, elders, evangelists, youth workers and Sunday school teachers. Planted churches survived persecution to provide Christ's appointed gospel workers among their own people. Today MERF continues the partnership between Christians and churches, east and west to strengthen and build up the witness of the relatively small, yet growing Christian communities in the Muslim world. Along with the Bible, good Christian publications in the languages of peoples continue to play a vital part in the growth of the Church in Muslim lands. MERF provides a wide range of sound printed Arabic books and a Catechism-based Sunday school curriculum. Over the past year there were many opportunities to distribute these openly to the public in various

book fairs and exhibitions as well as to gift them to a wide range of churches, pastors and ministries throughout Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and other Arab countries. Pray for these books to be read and bear good fruit.

Nurturing by Download

MERF's Arabic website, www.issa-almasih.com, makes Scriptures and publications freely available to help inquirers, converts, spiritual leaders and church or home Bible studygroups. Subjects range from the simple and elementary to more substantial, yet readable, short commentaries on Bible books and doctrines. Recently these free files were adapted for easy reading on mobile smart phones. The Bible and similar publications are downloadable at MERF's Farsi site: www.roshdino.org. *Pray for efforts to develop similar sites in Oromo, Somali, Bahasa Indonesia and other languages.*

[Extracted from MERF's February 2018 Newsletter.]

DEVOTIONAL
**OLD TESTAMENT
 RELIGION**



Benjamin B. Warfield

Psalm 51:12:
 ‘Restore to me the
 joy of your
 salvation.’

Read 2 Samuel 12.
 And David said to
 Nathan, ‘I have sinned

against the Lord’. And Nathan said to David, ‘The Lord has put away your sin’.

It may almost seem that David escaped from his crime too easily. We may read the narrative of 2 Samuel 12 and fail to observe the signs of that deep contrition which such hideous wickedness when once recognized surely must engender. There is the story of the sin drawn in all its shocking details. Then Nathan comes in with his beautiful parable of the ewe lamb, and its pungent application. And then we read simply: “And David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord’. And Nathan said to David, ‘The Lord also has put away your sin’.” After that comes only the story of how the child of sin was smitten, and how David besought the Lord for its life and finally acquiesced in the Divine judgment. One is apt to feel that David was more concerned to escape the consequences of his sin than to yield to the Lord the sacrifices of a broken and a contrite heart. Does it not seem cold to us and external, David’s simple acknowledgement of his sin and the Lord’s immediate remission of it? We feel the lack of the manifestation of a deeply repentant spirit, and are almost ready, we say, to wonder if David did not escape too easily from the evil he had wrought.

It is merely the simplicity of the narrative which is deceiving us in this. The single-hearted writer expects us to read into the bare words of David’s confession, ‘I have sinned against the Lord,’ all the spiritual exercises which those words are fitted to suggest and out of which they should have grown. And if we find it a little difficult to do so, we have only to turn to David’s penitential Psalms, to learn the depths of repentance which wrung this great and sensitive soul. One of them [51] —perhaps the

most penetrating portrayal of a truly penitent soul ever cast into human speech—is assigned by its title to just this crisis in his life; and I see no good reason why this assignment need be questioned. The whole body of them sound the depths of the sinful soul’s self-torment and longing for recovery as can be found nowhere else in literature; and taken in sequence present a complete portrayal of the course of repentance in the heart, from its inception in the rueful review of the past and the remorseful biting back of the awakened heart, through its culmination in a true return to God in humble love and trusting confidence, to its issue in the establishment of a new relation of obedience to God and a new richness of grateful service to him.

Let us take just these four, Psalms 6, 38, 51, 32. In Psalm 6 sounds the note of remorse - it is the torment of a soul’s perception of its sin that is here prominently brought to our most poignant observation. In Psalm 38, the note of hope—not indeed absent even from Psalm 6—becomes dominant and the sorrow and hatred of sin is coloured by a pervasive tone of relief. In Psalm 51, while there is no lessening of the accent of repentance there is along with the deep sense of the guilt and pollution of sin which is expressed also a note of triumph over the sin, which aspires to a clean heart and a steadfast spirit and a happy service of God in purity of life. While in Psalm 32, the sense of forgiveness, the experience of joy in the Lord, and the exercises of holy and joyful service overlie all else. Here we trace David’s penitent soul through all its experiences; his remorseful contemplation of his own sin, his passionate reaching out to the salvation of God, the gradual return of his experience of the joy of that salvation, his final issuing into the full glory of its complete realisation.

In some respects the most remarkable of this remarkable body of pictures of the inner experiences of a penitent soul, is that of Psalm 51. It draws away the veil for us and permits us to look in upon the spirit in the most characteristic act of repentance, just at the turning point, as it deserts its sin and turns to God. Here is revealed to us a sense of sin so poignant, a perception of the grace of God so soaring, an apprehension of the completeness of the revolution required in sinful man that he may become in any worthy sense a servant of God so profound, that one wonders in reading it

what is left for a specifically Christian experience to add to this experience of a saint of God under the Old Testament dispensation in turning from sin to God.

The wonderful depth of the religious experience and the remarkable richness of religious conception embodied in this Psalm have indeed proved a snare to the critics. 'David could not have had these ideas,' says Prof. T. C. Cheyne, brusquely; and, indeed, the David that Prof. Cheyne has constructed out of his imaginary reconstruction of the course of religious development in Israel, could not well have had these ideas. These are distinctively Christian ideas that the Psalm sets forth, and they could not have grown up of themselves in a purely natural heart. And therein lies one of the values of the Psalm to us; it reveals to us the essentially Christian type of the religion of Israel; it opens to our observation the contents of the mind and heart of a Spirit-led child of God in the ages past, and makes us to know the truly Christian character of his experiences in his struggle with sin and his aspirations towards God, and thus also to know the supernatural leading of God's people through all ages.

For consider for a moment the conception of God which throbs through all the passionate language of this Psalm. A God of righteousness who will not look upon sin with allowance; nay, who directs all things, even the emergence of acts of sin in his world, so that he may not only be just, but also 'may be justified when he speaks and clear when he judges.' A God of holiness whose Spirit cannot abide in our impure hearts. A God of unbounded power, who governs the whole course of events in accordance with his own counsels. But above all, a gracious God, full of lovingkindness, abundant in compassion, whose delight is in salvation. There is nothing here which goes beyond the great revelation of Exodus 34:6, 'a God full of compassion and gracious, abundant in lovingkindness and truth; keeping lovingkindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.' Indeed the language of the Psalm is obviously modelled on this of Exodus. But here it is not given from the lips of Jehovah, proclaiming His character, but returned to us from the heart of the repentant sinner, recounting the nature of the God with whom he has to do.

And what a just and profound sense of sin is revealed to us here. The synonymy of the

subject is almost exhausted in the effort to complete the self-accusation. 'My transgression, my iniquity, my sin;' I have been in rebellion against God, I have distorted my life, I have missed the mark; I have, to express it all, done what is evil in your sight—in the sight of you, the Standard of Holiness, the Law of Conduct personified. And these acts are but the expression of an inner nature of corruption, inherited from those who have gone before me; it was in iniquity that I was born, in sin that my mother conceived me. Shall a pure thing come from an impure? No, my open acts of sin are thought of not in themselves but as manifestations of what is behind and within; thrown up into these manifestations in act, in your own ordinance, for no other cause than that your righteous condemnation on me may be justified and your judgment be made clear. For it is not cleanness of act merely that you desire, but truth in the inward parts and wisdom in the hidden parts.

'It is not cleanness of act merely that you desire, but truth in the inward parts and wisdom in the hidden parts.'

Obviously the Psalmist is conceiving sin here as not confined to acts but consisting essentially of a great ocean of sin within us, whose waves merely break in sinful acts. No wonder the commentators remark that here we have original sin 'more distinctly expressed than in any other passage in the Old Testament.' Nothing is left to be added by the later revelation in the way of poignancy of conception—though much is, of course, left to be added in developed statement.

Accordingly, the conception of the radicalness of the operation required for the Psalmist's deliverance from sin, is equally developed. No surface remedy will suffice to eradicate a sin which is thus inborn, ingrained in nature itself. Hence the passionate cry: Create—it requires nothing less than a creative act—create me a clean heart—the heart is the totality of the inner life;—and make new within me a constant spirit—a spirit which will no more decline from Thee. Nothing less than this will suffice—a total rebirth as the New Testament would put it; an entire making over again can alone suffice to make such an one as

the Psalmist knows himself to be—not by virtue of his sins of act which are only the manifestation of what he is by nature, but by virtue of his fundamental character—acceptable to him who desires truth in the inward part; nay, nothing less than this can secure to him that steadfastness of spirit which will save his open acts from shame.

Nor does the Psalmist expect to be able, unaided, to live in the power of his new life. One of the remarkable features of the doctrinal system of the Psalm is the clear recognition it gives of the necessity, for the cleansing of the life, of the constant presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. ‘Take not your Holy Spirit from me and uphold me with a spirit of willingness.’ Yours to lead, mine to follow. Not autonomy but obedience, the ideal of the religious life. The operations of the Holy Spirit in the sphere of the moral life, the ethical activities of the Spirit, his sanctifying work, are but little referred to in the Old Testament, and when alluded to, it is chiefly in promises for the Messianic period. Here, David not merely prays for them in his own case, but announces them as part of the experience of the past and present. His chance of standing, he says in effect, hangs on the continued presence of the Holy Spirit of God in him; in the upholding within him thereby of a spirit of willingness.

Thus we perceive that in its conception of God, of sin, of salvation alike, this Psalm stands out as attaining the high-water mark of Old Testament revelation. It was by a hard pathway that David came to know God and himself so intimately. But he came thus to know both his own heart and the God of grace with a fullness and profundity of apprehension that it will be hard to parallel elsewhere. And it was no merely external knowledge that he acquired thus. It was the knowledge of experience. David knew sin because he had touched the unclean thing and sounded the depths of iniquity. He knew himself because he had gone his own way and had learned through what thickets and morasses that pathway led, and what was its end. And he knew God, because he had tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious. Yes, David had tasted and seen God's preciousness. David had experience of salvation. He knew what salvation was, and

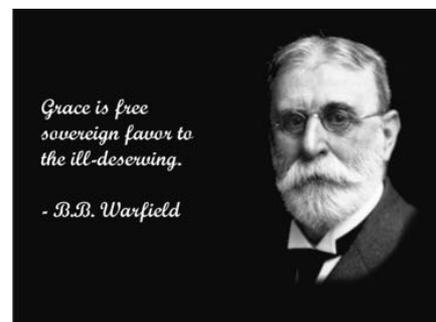
He knew its joy. But never had he known the joy of salvation as he knew it after he had lost it. And it is just here that the special poignancy of David's repentance comes in: it was not the repentance of a sinner merely, it was the repentance of a sinning saint.

It is only the saint who knows what sin is; for only the saint knows it in contrast with salvation, experienced and understood. And it is only the sinning saint who knows what salvation is: for it is only the joy that is lost and then found again that is fully understood. The depths of David's knowledge, the poignancy of his conceptions—of God, and sin, and salvation—carrying him far beyond the natural plane of his time and the development of the religious consciousness of Israel, may be accounted for, it would seem, by these facts.

He who had known the salvation of God and basked in its joy, came to know through his dreadful sin what sin is, and its terrible entail; and through this horrible experience, to know what the joy of salvation is—the joy which he had lost and only through the goodness of God could hope to have restored. In the biting pain of his remorse, it all becomes clear to him.

His sinful nature is revealed to him; and the goodness of God; his need of the Spirit; the joy of acceptance with God; the delight of abiding with him in his house. Hence his profound disgust at himself; his passionate longing for that purity without which he could not see God. And hence his culminating prayer: ‘Restore to me the joy of your salvation.’#

The above item is taken from Warfield's collection of sermons entitled *Faith and Life* [1916] and has received very occasional editing to update the language. Dr Warfield (1851-1921) was the greatest of the orthodox theologians who taught at Princeton Theological Seminary.



THE NATION

The Ruddock Review on Religious Freedoms

The Rev. George Ball, Minister on the Manning, and Convener of the Synod's Church and Nation Committee, has sent the following letter to Mr Ruddock's Committee.

29 January 2018

Dear Mr. Ruddock and Panel Members,

I am writing on behalf of the above church in relation to your review of religious freedoms as a result of the passing of the Marriage Amendment (Definition and Religious Freedoms) Act 2017.

We as a church are dismayed and disappointed at the introduction and legalization of same sex marriage. We believe it is immoral and contrary to the teaching of the Bible. It represents a clear rejection of the law of God and of that which is honourable.

We note in the legislation the exemption granted to Ministers of Religion. While this is welcome it is woefully inadequate. There is no equivalent exemption for civil celebrants who have a conscientious position on marriage. Conducting marriages is the occasional work of a parish minister. Preparing sermons and addresses is our regular weekly work. These addresses are generally recorded and available on-line for anyone to hear. The Marriage Amendment Act 2017 provides no protection against someone issuing a complaint about our Biblical teaching on marriage and taking us to a government tribunal. We have effectively lost the freedom to teach and preach all that the Bible says about marriage in our own church buildings.

Back in 2016 at our church in Taree, NSW, we put a message on the church sign stating, 'One Man + One Woman = Marriage'. There was no intent to offend, but a couple of local people complained to the local ABC. It provided us with some free publicity. However, if that were to happen today in 2018 the repercussions for us promise to be much more serious. We could find ourselves potentially before a tribunal or commission.

We have effectively lost our freedom to state what we believe on our church notice board.

We also have genuine concern for those involved in the 'wedding business' whose conscience does not allow them to participate in same sex marriage. These include printers, taxi operators, photographers, florists, bakers, caterers, etc. These are usually small family businesses. The Marriage Amendment Act 2017 provides no protection whatsoever for these vulnerable people. We are not scaremongering. There is the example in the UK of a small family bakery - Asher's - who were found guilty of having broken discrimination laws by refusing to make a cake with a slogan supporting same sex marriage. They lost their case in the Supreme Court.

We also have serious concerns for our children who are in schools that promote LGBTIQ sex and gender theory. Parents should have the right to be notified of and be permitted to withdraw their children from such classes. The Marriage Amendment Act 2017 provides no protection for such parents (and children).

Christian schools that uphold the traditional biblical view of marriage under this new law have no protection from someone bringing a complaint against them to a government tribunal. Christian schools and religious organisations should have the freedom to employ people who adhere to their ethos and beliefs, including their teaching on marriage, without fear of being reported to an anti-discrimination commission.

As you can see we are extremely disappointed and alarmed at the lack of protection afforded in the Marriage Amendment Act 2017 for people who continue to believe in traditional marriage between a man and a woman. Freedom of religion is not merely the freedom to worship privately, but the freedom to express our faith and convictions publicly without fear of legal restrictions and repercussions.

Yours sincerely,

George D. Ball

THE THINGS THAT DEFINE US

Peter Uren



Men often go through a crisis of identity, especially those transitioning from work to enforced retirement, and for those who have been diagnosed with a life-changing illness. The author, Peter J. Uren, has been a carer of his wife, Judy, who has bipolar disorder, for nearly 20 years. Both are members of the Hunter Congregation of the PCEA. He was also forced to retire from a senior position within Defence due to chronic depression, and he has since been diagnosed with a life-changing neurological condition.

Recently, my wife and I caught up with some friends whom we hadn't seen for about a year. As often happens when you haven't seen someone for a while, there were lots of questions about families and health. So, inevitably, the conversation centred around my neurological condition and how things are going for me, my treatment and the plethora of drugs I'm taking, the side-effects of that treatment, and the future, what I can do or can't do going forward.

After what seemed to me about an hour, I wanted to change the subject. I wanted to talk about something or someone else other than myself, so I said that I didn't want to be defined by my condition. While it was my current focus, it didn't have to be the only subject about which we can talk. And quickly, the discussion turned to other topics of mutual interest. But after our friends left, I started to think about what really does define us, or more specifically, what defines

me. Is who I am more than what I do or did, or what I suffer from? More to the point, how do I want to be remembered when I'm gone?

I once wrote the story of my life up to that time and, briefly, how I'd transitioned from working to being retired. I said this: "*When you meet other blokes, the conversation usually starts with, 'What's your name?' And the second question is almost always, 'What do you do?'*" My point was that, men in particular, are defined by what they do, or did before they retired. We so often measure ourselves against one another by our jobs, our occupations or professions; it sets the pecking order. Who we are, is what we do.

In the last 45 odd years, I've worked in a number of occupations, both paid and unpaid. Straight out of school, and after an all-too-brief time at Teachers College, I went to work at the Port Kembla Steel Works where I started a traineeship as an Industrial Chemist. But that lasted only a few months before I joined the Air Force. While the Teachers College and Steel Works were good experiences, they did not define who I was, or what I became.

I served for nearly 23 years in the RAAF, and a further seven years with Defence as a civilian. During that time, I had a number of positions including as Unit Administrative and Financial Accounting Officers, Staff Officer, Base Services Manager and as a Senior Non-commissioned Officer in charge of a Base Library. Post retirement, I also worked as an Office Administrator on a voluntary basis for a church I once attended. But while I have skills in administration, leadership, management and in finances, none of these positions defined who I was, and they certainly have no significance for me now.

'I started to think about what really does define us, or more specifically, what defines me. Is who I am more than what I do or did, or what I suffer from?'

I met my wife while I was on my first posting to Butterworth in Malaysia. Recently we celebrated our 40th Wedding Anniversary, a significant milestone in anyone's language, especially in today's society where very few seem to be willing to make long-term commitments. But while I'm happy to be defined as my wife's husband, that title only has relevance for us, and only for as long as we are both alive. As soon as one or the other passes into eternity, that relationship ceases to be.

We couldn't have children of our own, much

to our great frustration and sadness. However, on our second posting to Butterworth, we were fortunate enough to be able to adopt a newborn baby boy. Our son, who turned 26 last August, and now resides in Brisbane, recently paid us a visit with his girlfriend. I happily wear the title of father and, maybe one day, even grandfather if their relationship blossoms.

I have a brother and two sisters. My two sisters have five children between them for whom I'm an uncle, and one of these children has a daughter for whom I'm a great uncle. I also have numerous aunts, uncles, cousins and second cousins, and no doubt third and fourth cousins somewhere. But, with the rare exception, I never see them, and hardly ever correspond with them. So, while these relationships might be great for those who document our family tree, they have little real meaning for me at this time.



Motorcycles have long played a prominent part in my life. While I could never be defined as a skilled or talented rider, I have loved riding since I was a teenager. The 'Golden Age' for me was during 1986-87. I worked in St Kilda Barracks in Melbourne and I had just purchased my first 'big' bike: a Suzuki GSX 750. I loved going to work because I could ride my bike, and I loved going home for the same reason. I rode it during the week, and I rode it on weekends. I rode with my mates, and I rode alone. I even once rode it to Wagga Wagga where I met up with some friends, and then through the Snowy Mountains, and back home again via Maryville and the Black Spur. But in recent years, I've had to sell my motorcycles due to balance issues related to my medical condition. So, I can hardly call myself a motorcyclist anymore; it just has no meaning for me now.

I started writing in the late 90s. I would write about my motorcycle riding adventures and trips interstate. My stories read like reports, which is how I had learned to write after 30 years working

in the military. I also dabbled in poetry as a way of coping with my wife's illness. In mid-2012, I joined Stroud Writers where I was encouraged to write fiction. That's where my writing really took off. In the last six years, I've written and self-published four novels and a booklet of poetry. But while I like to think of myself as an author and a writer, I'm really a small player, certainly when compared to the great writers of our time.

Church has always played a prominent role in my life. I've been attending church for almost as long as I can remember. I became a Christian in the early 1980s in Melbourne, and have been a member of my local church for the past several years. I was also once an elder of that church, and for eight glorious months, I helped pastor the church while they waited for an ordained minister from Scotland to take up the charge. Several weeks ago, a friend from my writer's group had a health scare when she ended up in intensive care with kidney failure. In conversation with her after she had been discharged from hospital, she said she wanted to have a 'talk' with me as 'a man of faith'. I think what she meant by 'a man of faith' was that I was someone who lived what he believed. I hope to have that conversation with her soon. But while I'm happy to accept the term Christian, in its historical definition, modesty demands that the term 'a man of faith' belongs for others.

I couldn't finish this piece without at least mentioning my health. It is, after all, the topic that started it all. I was all excited when I started treatment 20 months ago. For the first time in eight years I held out hope that my symptoms would improve. But as the drugs began their work, they gave me side-effects that were as bad or worse than the symptoms. And as my body became used to the drugs, new, and more powerful, replacements were gradually introduced, each of which had their own side-effects, or worse, they poisoned my body and made me more susceptible to infections.

I started on another drug recently that promises improvement, but will likely leave me further debilitated. Sometimes I wonder if the treatment is worse than the original condition. I've already had a chest infection that eventually ended, but only after six lots of antibiotics. I haven't slept soundly all night for more than a few nights in a row for many months now. My treatment affects every aspect of my life: my diet, what I can eat and drink; where I can go; what I can do; and my relationships, I'm constantly tired and irritable; and I'm even more depressed.

When I was a child, I suffered from juvenile asthma; I was known as an asthmatic. My illness

defined who I was, or at least gave a term for others to describe me. As I grew older, I heard of other people who suffered with various conditions: someone with schizophrenia was a schizophrenic; someone with an alcohol addiction was an alcoholic; and someone with a severe mental retardation was a spastic. Thankfully, we are less inclined, in these more enlightened times, to use these terms to describe people. Also, thankfully, there is no single term that describes my neurological condition.

So, what have I ended up with? I started out with the hope of determining what were the things that defined me. Am I more than just the sum of all the jobs that I had undertaken over my working life, all the activities I had enjoyed, or all the relationships I had and still have? I even wondered how I was to be remembered, assuming I was to be remembered at all.

‘Am I more than just the sum of all the jobs that I had undertaken over my working life, all the activities I had enjoyed, or all the relationships I had and still have?’

Well, I am a husband, and hope to continue being so for many more anniversaries to come. I am a father, and maybe one day, God-willing, a father-in-law and a grandfather. I am a writer, even though I stand in the shadows of the Greats of Literature. But the one term that defines me above all others is that of Christian – I am a Christian. My identity or now and eternity is found in Jesus Christ who died for me and rose again. I am accepted in the Beloved. It means that, after I have lived my life here on earth, that I have eternal life in heaven to look forward to, and that my name is to be found in the Lamb’s Book of Life. It means that, at the Final Judgement, there shall be no condemnation for me, because Jesus Christ has borne my sins on the Cross of Calvary. It means that all the pain and suffering I’ve gone through, all the symptoms and side-effects of my condition, all the tears I’ve shed, will all be taken away. Oh, happy days!

So, what are the things that define you?

Peter Uren is a member of the Hunter PCEA Congregation

TRUE IDENTITY

Notes of the funeral message for
Bernie de Haan, 13 December, 2017.

George D. Ball

Bernie loved the church. I’m not putting words in his mouth. He often said it himself. He not only said it – but he showed it by his life and commitment to the church. As a member of the church he was an example and encouragement to all of us. He was always present.

We shouldn’t be surprised therefore at Bernie’s choice of text for his funeral service: it’s a text describing the church.

‘But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light’ (1 Peter 2: 9).

All these phrases and expressions were originally used to describe ancient Israel (see Ex. 19: 5-6). As we consider Bernie’s text we will have time only to look at the first half of this verse.

1. You are a Chosen Race.

On the international scale ancient Israel was an insignificant little nation. In the book of Exodus, they were living in tents. They had no land of their own. They had just emerged from 400 years of slavery and subjection to Egypt. When they did possess their own land, it was a postage stamp - smaller than Tasmania. They were constantly overshadowed and endangered by the larger major powers – Assyria, Babylon and Persia. But little Israel was valuable because it was chosen by God. He entered into a special covenant relationship with them; He gave them His law; He brought them into the promised land; He gave them prophets; He made His presence known among them. It was that which gave them value.

Peter describes the New Testament Church as a chosen people. They are the Israel of God (Gal. 6: 16). Even though they were nothing special in the world; they were an insignificant minority; persecuted; living as exiles; dispersed from their homeland; and living like refugees (1 Peter 1:1). But they had value and dignity and purpose because they were chosen by God and precious to Him. That set them apart from the rest of mankind.

Christian friend, the staggering thing is that God has also chosen us too. It’s not that we were a choice people, or an elite people, or gifted, or glamorous or

good. We weren't. But we are a chosen people. That's what gives us value. It's not what we own; or what we do; or what we achieve. Our value lies in the fact that God has chosen to love us for reasons known only to Him; that Christ has died for us; and that the Holy Spirit has come to live in us.

Bernie understood that. He was a humble, modest man. He didn't achieve any academic or national honours. He didn't have a flash house or car. He wasn't famous. He never had success on the sporting field. But he was one of the Lord's chosen and was precious to Him. Even his death was precious to God (Ps. 116: 15).

Friend, is this true of you? Has God chosen you? Do you love Him? Do you love His church? That's why Peter says, 'make every effort to confirm your calling and election' (2 Peter 1: 10).

2. A Royal Priesthood.

In the Old Testament period access into the presence of God was limited to the priests, and that by way of sacrifice. But now in the New Testament period, since Christ our Great High Priest has offered Himself as the one perfect, final, sufficient sacrifice, every believer is a priest. We can enter into the presence of God because Jesus has opened up for us a new and life-giving way. We are a royal priesthood. Royal? Because we serve the Great King. That is our very great privilege. That is the privilege of every true believer. This was Bernie's privilege while he was among us. That's why he prayed in his own home, and at our Bible studies.

Because he was a royal priest. He exercised that privilege. But Bernie's privileges did not end at death. He has entered, we believe, into the immediate presence of His Lord and Saviour. The Shorter Catechism puts it like this, '*The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, rest in their graves until the resurrection*' (Q. 37). The psalmist described it thus, 'In your presence, there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore' (Ps. 16: 11).

Let me ask you friends, are you a royal priest? Is Jesus your Great High Priest? Are you confident of your acceptance with God? Do you pray? Are you confident that if you died today, you would go immediately to be with Christ?

3. A Holy Nation.

Israel was a holy nation. She was set apart from all the other nations to be committed to the true and living God. Sadly, though, she was often no better than the other nations. Today it's not ancient Israel or the modern state of Israel that's a holy nation. The church is a holy nation. Bernie was a vital member of the church and citizen of this holy nation. Though he was Dutch by birth and Aussie by choice; his

most important identity was as a member of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what distinguished him. That's how he wanted to be known. He was first and foremost a Christian. A member of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was a man of God. His character, standards, values, goal and purpose in life were profoundly different from the world around him. He was the salt of the earth. That's why his death is such a profound loss to the church – and to the world (if only they knew it).

Friend, what is your identity? How do you like to be known? What distinguishes you in the world? Perhaps you like to be known as a proud Aussie? It's far more important to be a citizen in God's holy nation; a member of the church of the Lord Jesus.

4. A People for His Own Possession.

God's people are His special property. He owns them and protects them. No one can steal them or ultimately harm them. This was comforting news to the scattered and suffering saints that Peter was writing to. It's also comforting news for grieving and sorrowing widows today. We have confidence that God is able to protect His people so that none will be lost.

Jesus says, '*My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand*' (Jn. 10: 27-28).

The prophet Isaiah asks, '*Can a woman forget her nursing child or lack compassion for the child of her womb? Even if these forget, yet I will not forget you*' (Isa. 49: 15).

The apostle Paul writes, '*Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*' (Romans 8: 35-39).

Bernie was safe in life because he was kept by God. He is still as safe today though his body is dead. Friend, how safe are you? Who keeps you? It was Bernie's desire and prayer, especially for the members of his own family, that they too might be saved and go at last to heaven. #

George Ball is minister of Manning PCEA.

MANNING NEWS

The Manning congregation suffered a great loss when a beloved member, **Bernie de Haan**, was suddenly called home on 7th December 2017 aged 81. Bernie and his wife Freya came into membership in the year 2000 after they moved from Sydney to retire in Upper Lansdowne. They endeared themselves to everyone in the congregation and Bernie became a valued elder. He was an example of faithfulness and diligence in all his activities. He delighted to be present at both services every Lord's Day as well the midweek meeting. He loved the Saviour, and he loved the Word and delighted to talk about both. His death was a shock, but he was prepared. He loved to recite Question 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism. 'What is your only comfort in life and death'? A. 'That I am not my own, but belong body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.' We extend our sincere sympathy to Freya who will miss him most after 57 years of marriage, and to their sons John and Ben, and their families. 'Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel' (2 Sam. 3: 38).

HASTINGS



The Rev **John Forbes** (38) of Bonar Bridge and Lairg Free Church of Scotland, has accepted the call of the Hastings Congregation and immigration formalities are now in process. Mr Forbes was born in Blantyre, Malawi, took a degree in engineering at Cambridge University after leaving school, and afterwards was employed in accountancy work in Paisley and Inverness before deciding to train for the Free Church ministry. He began a three-year course in the Free Church College in Edinburgh in 2005, where he obtained a Bachelor of Theology degree in 2008 and was ordained and inducted at Lairg on 1 August 2008. Mr Forbes is married to Mary from Shawbost in Lewis and they have five children under 12. The visit of the family last year around Synod time was a real encouragement, and we pray for their safe arrival in due time.

CARRUM DOWNS

The Rev **David Kumnick** is still experiencing health difficulties and so Dr Rowland Ward (Interim-Moderator) will increase his usual monthly supply to cover the services and pastoral visiting, especially having regard to the projected opening of the Church Building (probably after Easter on Saturday 7 April). Prayer for David and Josée would be appreciated.

NARRE WARREN



There was a well-attended light luncheon after the morning service on 30 January, the day the ministry at Narre Warren of the Rev **Sjirk Bajema** officially concluded. Elders Terry Buck and Stewart Loudon paid tribute to Mr Bajema's work in the congregation over the nine years since his induction on 17 January 2009. Dr Ward, representing the Southern Presbytery, referred to the enormous population growth since the site was purchased 30 years ago, and noted the diligence which Mr Bajema had applied to the work of the ministry. Sjirk and Betty Ann and Andrew were presented with a lovely gift of a picture. Meanwhile, Mr Bajema is taking accumulated leave and organising the sale of his home preparatory to taking up ministry in the Reformed Church of Oamaru, NZ about the close of March. The Rev Andres Miranda is Interim Moderator for Narre Warren.



PCEA YOUNG ADULTS CAMP

Friday 30 March to Monday 2 April 2018

Easter Long Weekend

WHERE Maclean, Northern NSW
At the residence of John and
Judy Greensill

WHEN Friday 30 March (dinner) to
lunch on Monday 2 April 2018

WHO The camp is restricted to 15 to
30 years

SPEAKER Robin Tso, Hunter Barrington
PCEA

COST \$60 per person
Subsidy or some travel costs
available on request

ACCOMMODATION
BYO tent, swag, camper trailer
or caravan (no grey nomads)
Some tents and sleeping bags are
available - just let us know

ACTIVITES Kayaks, swimming, beach, ball
games, walks, fishing, Maclean
Highland Gathering

HOW TO GET THERE
XPT train: (from Sydney or Brisbane) stops at
Grafton with connecting bus to Maclean (pickup from
Grafton can be arranged)

Flying: Jetstar, Virgin and Rex airlines fly to Coffs
Harbour, Ballina and Rex airlines (Grafton). Pickup
from Coffs Harbour, Ballina or Grafton can be
arranged.
Transport from Brisbane or Gold Coast can also be
arranged.

WHAT TO BRING
Bible/pen/notebook, togs/swimmers, warm clothes,
insect repellent, sleeping bag/pillow
Board games/cards
Usual things: toiletries, torch

MORE INFO
Stewart Carswell: Ph: 07 33971138;
sccarswell@optusnet.com.au

SEARCH WORK

JANUARY 2018

SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE

Intermediate omit questions 4 and 7

ROMANS chapter 1

1. The gospel of God is concerning which person? (3 verses)
2. Why did Paul thank God for the Romans?
3. Why was Paul not ashamed of the gospel of Christ?
4. How does the creation leave men without excuse?

Chapter 2

5. Why does the one who judges another condemn himself?
6. What will happen to those who sin without law, and those who sin in the law?
7. Under what conditions is there profit in circumcision?
8. Who is a true Jew and what is true circumcision?

JUNIOR

GENESIS chapter 1

1. In the beginning, what did God create?
 2. What happened when God said, Let there be light?
 3. What did God create on the fourth day?
 4. In whose image did God create man, and what did he say when he blessed them? (2 verses)
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FEBRUARY 2018

SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE

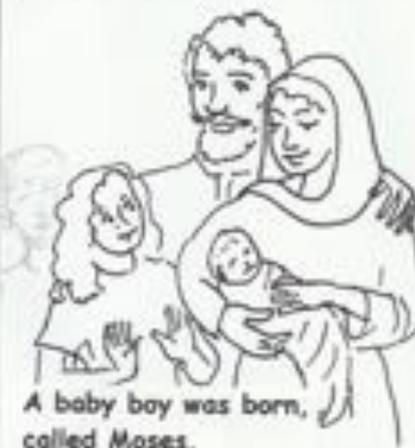
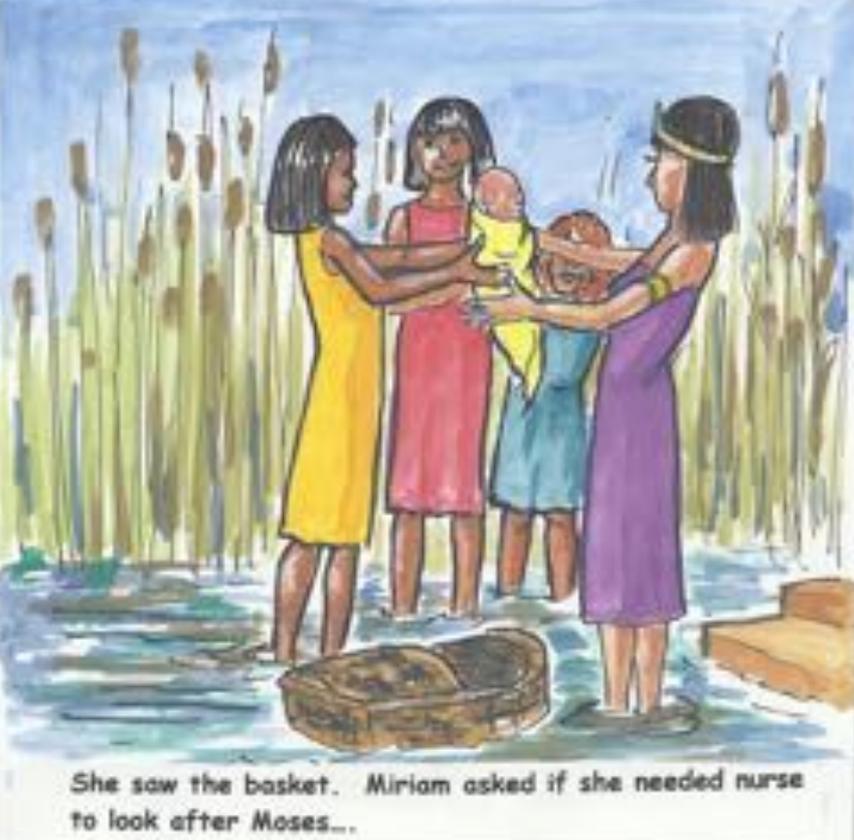
Intermediate omit questions 2 and 7

ROMANS chapter 3

1. What was the chief advantage that the Jew had?
 2. Quote the verses from Psalm 14 (or Psalm 53) that Paul uses to prove that both Jew and Gentile are under sin.
3. Can anyone be justified by the deeds of the law?
 4. By what means, do we conclude, is a man justified?

Chapter 4

5. What was counted to Abraham for righteousness?
6. Was the promise to Abraham through the law or through the righteousness of faith?
7. How strong was Abraham's faith? (2 verses)
8. On what condition shall righteousness be imputed to us also? (2 verses)

<h1>The Baby in the Basket</h1>	 <p>The new Pharaoh hated the Israelites, he made them slaves.</p>	<p>He told the midwives to kill all the baby boys. They didn't.</p> 
 <p>A baby boy was born, called Moses.</p>	 <p>He was hidden in a basket in the river. His sister, Miriam watched him.</p>	<p>Pharaoh's daughter and her came to the river to bathe.</p> 
 <p>She saw the basket. Miriam asked if she needed nurse to look after Moses...</p>		 <p>and ran to fetch her mother to look after the baby.</p>  <p>Moses grew up in Pharaoh's palace.</p>