

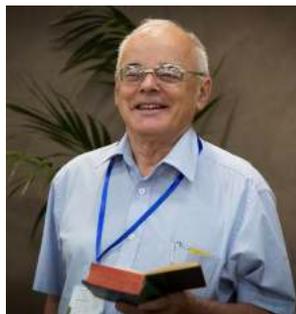
The Presbyterian Banner

August 2018



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To him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think...to him be glory in the church - Eph 3:20



FROM THE EDITOR

CAN A NAZI BE CONVERTED?

Yesterday I was preaching from Acts 9 about Saul's conversion which believers at first could hardly believe was genuine. The next day I came across the account of Ries Jansen (1910-49), who had a religious upbringing but became a tyrannical Nazi collaborator, on the blog of Launceston Free Reformed minister, Wes Bredenhof. The story comes from "A Collection of True Life Stories," (a privately circulated publication) most of which were taken from a Dutch book, *Honingdroppels* (Drops of Honey) and translated by a godly Dutch-Canadian farmer in Lindsay Ontario, Gilbert Zekveld (1928-2002), who latterly was connected with the Chesley, Ontario, Free Presbyterian congregation. Dr Bredenhof, when a seminary student, knew Zekveld as a friend and gave him some editorial assistance. It's a story of God's grace and the kindness of a Christian woman.

Cover: Bottlebrushes bursting out

The name of Ries [Marinus] Jansen was well-known in the Veluwe [a forested region in the middle of the Netherlands] during the winter of 1944-1945. It was a name that inspired hate. He was a hunter of men par excellence. He was wounded in a shoot-out with the underground in Rotterdam. However, he recovered and continued his lurid business on the Veluwe. After the liberation of the Netherlands, he faced judgment in a criminal court. His misdeeds were so heinous that he received the death sentence. A subsequent request for pardon was refused.

One of his victims was a leader of the underground in the Alblasserwaard polder [in the province of South Holland]. When the mother [Mrs Snoek] of that victim read about Jansen's sentence, she sent him a Bible and admonished him in a letter to seek refuge with the Lord. What compassion when a mother whose son fell into the hands of that man can do such a thing. It was an act richly blessed by the Lord. Ries Jansen repented, not to escape punishment, but to be a witness of God's love before the firing squad. He repented to be a witness for the God who took this murderer home. A certain Mr. Bomhof was an evangelist from Enschede and he was called upon to assist Ries Jansen in his final hours. He tells the rest of the story:

"Sir, there is a telephone call for you from Arnhem." It was the director of the chapel. He reported that Jansen would be executed next Friday, because his request for pardon was refused. However, the man wanted to speak with me.

I did not sleep much that night. The next day was difficult for me too. Apart from two letters from the condemned man, he was absolutely unknown to me. And what do you say to a man who only has one more day to live? It did not appeal to me in any way. But I had long known the words: in the hour what you need to speak will be given to you.

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After a while, I met Jansen in the waiting room. He was small and now skinny, but still muscular and had dark hair. His white face betrayed four years of waiting with no hope of respite. But his step was sure and he looked me steadfastly in the eye. He did not in any way look like a man about to be executed. His hands rested on the table folded. He looked me deep in the eye and I reciprocated. Then I took both his hands, pulled towards me and said, "Early tomorrow you will travel to great glory. I envy you. Think of it, tomorrow you will be home with Jesus."

Then he became glad also, and with a happy face he said, "Yes, sir, I also long much for the time they will lead me to the post. Then, even though I am so unworthy, then I may see him. I experienced that he forgave all my sins, that is now the faith I live by. I have already made my peace with the post. Jesus made it well."

But then he wept and said, "O, my sins make such a terrible separation between God and my soul. My guilt is great, but I know that the Lord goes a way of justice with me. The punishment is just, I deserve all of it." It became silent for a while. Then he sighed and said, "Sir..." I interrupted and said, "Call me brother, for we are one in Jesus."

"Brother," he continued, grateful, "but there is one more heavy load that burdens me. I did not do a thing for Jesus, nothing..." and again he wept — "I go to him with empty hands." I told him, "Brother, take courage. You don't come with empty hands. Your first letter was a great blessing in the place where I live. Remember the thief on the cross. After almost two thousand years he still speaks. He has been a blessing to many."

Then, suddenly, he was very happy. His face literally shone. The truth of the Bible verse, "Death, where is your sting? Hell, where is your victory?" was sitting across from me on the other side of the table. I had never before seen such a victory in the face of death.

When his wife arrived, he was composed. He stood calmly. He said, "My wife, be strong. I am not afraid. I am ready. There is no more pain for me. Yes, you will remain behind with the child, but the Lord will be with you."

That afternoon we spoke some more. His warm meal was getting cold. I told him not to let his food get cold. He ate like a hungry man. Suddenly he said, "But did you eat? Come on, let us share." Together we finished the meal of potatoes and beans. Then we discussed Romans 8, his favourite Bible chapter. "Yes," he said, "the Bible from which you read was given me by a mother whose son I arrested. When she read in the paper that I was sentenced to death, she bought a Bible and a hymnal. She wrote and admonished me to take refuge in Jesus. Her act brought me to Jesus'

feet." He presented this Bible (with an inscription) and the hymnal to his little daughter.

Later in the afternoon, his family were all there. There were fifteen people meeting with him in the visitors' room. He asked me then to accompany him to the execution post. It was no more a place of terror for us. Together we meditated on Hebrews 12:1-15. The family made a tearful farewell. He accompanied them to the door. Then he called out, "Wife, family, look back once more. Look at me. See how calm I am. Remember this. Listen! My hope is in the Lord Jesus. He is my all. I go with him tomorrow morning to the place I will be executed. There he will receive me into his everlasting arms. Farewell wife, farewell family, look to Jesus. Until we meet...at home!"

Then we continued our discussion on that blessed passage of Romans 8. The hours passed by without our noticing. However, at 1:00 AM, he was very tired. I saw it and ask him if he wanted to rest. He did. That's how we parted.

At 3:30 AM, there was a knock at the door which woke me up. Jansen did not sleep, but he was visibly rested. He spoke with his brother, who was also a Nazi collaborator. His brother had come from the mines to say his farewell. Ries admonished him to repent and the brother wept when we left.

The rest of the time we discussed Psalm 23, where it deals with the valley of the shadow of death and where it speaks of not fearing any evil, and God's nearness in all this.

Peace was visible in this man's heart. But around 6:00 AM this peace retreated into the background. A little later he called out, "O, that post, that post, that post!" I said, "Brother, you must learn another lesson. That post is the devil. He shows you that post. Don't look at it, but in faith look only to Jesus." And with my arm pointing up to the sky, I said, "Jesus' sacrificial death is all my hope and rest."

In the meantime, my soul was at prayer. Thanks be to God, the brightness of heaven could once again be seen on his face. A moment later, he called out, "O brother, the post is gone. Jesus' sacrificial death is my hope and all my rest. There is victory, victory in the blood of the Lamb." Everyone cried, but me. I could not cry, for my soul was jubilant.

In the dawn we prayed together. After the "Amen," I asked him to pray. He prayed in silence. When I asked him to do it out loud, he hesitated for a moment because he was not used to that. But after a moment, he prayed. I heard him pray for his parents, his wife, his child, his family, the prison warden, the guards and himself. Finally he asked the Lord to receive him into his open arms. They called us. We saw many authorities in the hallway. The guards came to shake hands with Jansen. In a closed jeep we sat down, facing each other, flanked by four police officers.

The jeep stopped at an open spot in the forest. Silence reigned all around. A fog hung between the trees. After we walked around the jeep, we saw twenty young men with red berets, military police. They stood there in a semi-circle.

Altogether I counted forty people present. Together we went to the post. He was very calm. A police officer tied a thin rope around his waist. We stood there, hand in hand, and I said, "Brother, until we meet in glory with Jesus."

I then stepped backward, looked at him, and stopped beside the firing squad. He looked up to heaven and his arm pointed upward. Slowly, for everyone to hear, he called out, "Jezus, uw verzoenend sterven, blijft het rustpunt van mijn hart" ("Jesus, thy propitiating death is the resting place of my heart").

They blindfolded him.

His hand pointed forward and he said, "Men, you are all my friends. You are not my enemies, but my friends." He thanked me for the support I gave him in his last hours. Again he pointed to heaven and everyone heard his jubilant cry, "Lord Jesus, through the blindfold I see you, nailed to the cross for my sins." And still louder, he cried out triumphantly, "Yes, Lord Jesus, I come!"

Shots were heard, echoing through the forest. The angels carried him into paradise.

The Inspector of Police was beside me. He said, "I'm amazed about what that man said. I don't know him like this. He was always as hard as a stone. Did he really mean what he said? I used to know him. He was terrible. What he was, and now this. I don't understand." I said, "Did you not hear his last words? No one is a comedian in the face of death. I have his last letter here. Do you want to hear it?" I read the letter to him. He answered, "Sir, I say nothing. My mouth is closed."

Some people came and shook hands with me. It made a deep impression on everyone who was there. May the Lord give his blessing to all who read this story.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst.

Paul: *1 Timothy 1:15*

SEARCH WORK

SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE
Intermediate omit questions 3 and 4

REVELATION chapter 3

1. What promise was given to the few in Sardis who had not defiled their garments?
2. What would those of the synagogue of Satan in Philadelphia be forced to do?
3. What would the Lord do to the Laodiceans because they were neither hot nor cold?
4. Who shall sit with Christ on his throne?

Chapter 4

5. How does John describe the one who sat on the throne in heaven? (2 verses)
6. What did the twenty four elders say when they cast their crowns before the throne?

Chapter 5

7. What was the answer of the elder when John wept because no man was found worthy to open the book [scroll]?
8. What song was sung in heaven when the Lamb had taken the book [scroll]?

JUNIOR

GENESIS chapter 17

1. Why was Abram's name changed to Abraham?
2. What was God's promise to Sarai when her name was changed to Sarah? (2 verses)
- 3.. What was God's answer to Abraham when he prayed that Ishmael might live before him?

chapter 18:1--15

- 4... What did the Lord say to Abraham after Sarah had laughed within herself? (2 verses)

Answers to Mrs Irene Steel, PO Box 942, Epping NSW 1710 iesteel@gmail.com

Outer Darkness

George D. Ball



The Rev. George Ball was minister of Narre Warren PCEA 1998-2008 and has served Manning River PCEA since May 2008.

These are notes on Mark 15:33 for a sermon preached 22 July 2018

Jesus was crucified at 9 am. While he hung on the cross he was the butt of ridicule and scorn. Passers-by taunted him (v.29). The chief priests and scribes joined in the chorus of mockery, ‘He could save others, but he couldn’t save himself’ (which was ironically true). The two criminals with him also heaped abuse on him (v.32).

Then at midday a thick darkness suddenly descended over the whole land of Israel (33). All three synoptics record this event, which suggests they thought it significant. But none offer any explanation or comment. While the sun shone elsewhere, the land of Judea was plunged into darkness. The great light in the sky was switched off. The sun failed. An eerie silence that was to last for three hours filled the air. There was silence above and silence below. The mocking and the abuse stopped.

It has often been remarked that when Jesus was born in Bethlehem the night was converted to day when the Angel of the Lord and the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds. At Golgotha the day was changed to darkness – it was midnight at midday. There were no angels – but many devils – who it appeared, were crushing the seed of the woman. It seemed that darkness was overcoming the light.

How do we explain such an event? It wasn’t an eclipse – it couldn’t have been. This was Passover, which coincided with the full moon, when there is no possibility of an eclipse. Besides, the darkness lasted 3 hours – eclipses don’t last that long. Others suggest that the darkness was caused by a sudden storm from the eastern deserts – ‘a black sirocco’ – that filled the air with dust. But there was total darkness – a blackout. The only explanation is that this was a wonder – an act of God in the truest sense – a supernatural act. It was the hand of God that veiled the sun. It was a miracle that we can’t explain

– anymore than we can explain the feeding of the 5,000, or the walking on water, or the raising of Lazarus.

There is no natural explanation. We can’t explain it. We don’t understand it. If we think we know what was going on during those three hours of darkness we are proudly mistaken. There are many things we can’t understand. Who can understand the majesty of the mystery of Three in One; or the majesty of the mystery of God’s decrees and his relationship with sin; or the majesty of the mystery of the eternal Son of God becoming man and possessing two distinct natures forever; or the majesty of the mystery of the infinitely Holy Son of God made sin; or the mystery of the majesty of how Jesus could pay for all the sins of all his people on the Cross; or the majesty of the mystery of how the eternal Son of God could be separated from his Father? Neither can we understand the majesty of the mystery of the Son of God dying on the Cross enveloped in darkness. We can say many things about the Cross; we can explain the principle of sacrifice, and substitution, and redemption, and propitiation and so on. But ultimately, we need to remember that Calvary was veiled in darkness. Darkness symbolises mystery. There is much mystery at Calvary.

We talk about the simple Gospel – and it is - even a child can understand it. But the Gospel is also infinitely profound. We can never exhaust it. As we come to the place so holy and so awful, the wisest thing to do is to first remove our shoes, bend our knees and bow our heads in grateful silence.

+++

But the question may be asked, ‘What could the darkness mean?’ We presume it had a meaning. God is its author. He made the light and the darkness. He often produced cosmic signs to highlight significant events on earth. This was no exception. What then was he saying?

First, consider the darkness as God’s message to the nation of Israel. Surely, He was calling for her attention that afternoon. Just as he signalled Jesus birth by means of the star that rested over Bethlehem; and he signalled Jesus baptism by the Spirit coming down like a dove; he signalled Jesus transfiguration by a cloud overhead; so here he signalled Jesus death by a thick covering of darkness. These were all major events. But what happened that Friday afternoon marked it as the most important day in history.

The darkness ensured that this event couldn’t be ignored or avoided. Everything stopped that afternoon – in the home, the cooking and cleaning stopped. On the farm, the oxen stopped ploughing. The shops closed. The schools ceased from teaching. The temple services came to a halt. Every traveller was stranded. Nothing could be done. It was

terrifying. Everyone must have been asking – ‘*what’s happened?*’ ‘*What’s gone wrong?*’

The Lord was also declaring his judgement on Israel via the darkness. Just as light is a blessing, so darkness is often a sign of judgement in the Bible. Remember in Genesis 1: 3 that light was God’s first and greatest gift to the world because God was that light. Jesus declares, ‘*He makes his sun rise on the evil and the good*’ (Matt. 5: 45). Light is a universal gift from God that everyone, whether good or bad, can enjoy. How glad we are to see the light of a new day, especially if it’s been a long night. But God took that ‘common gift’ away that day. Was this not nature, through its Creator, protesting at the treachery and treason that had been committed in the land of Israel that day? Not only was the land covered in darkness – but God’s beloved Son was also covered in darkness. He too had been stripped of all common mercies. Every comfort was removed. He was being treated even worse than the worst person on earth.

That day should also have reminded Israel of another occasion when God in judgement brought darkness. God wrought judgement upon against Pharaoh by darkness (Exodus 10: 21f). Darkness was the ninth and penultimate plague. Recall that the Lord sent Moses to Pharaoh and said, “*Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, let my son go that he may serve me. If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son*” (Ex. 4:22-23). But Pharaoh refused. So, the Lord sent plagues – water turned to blood, frogs, gnats, flies, death of livestock, boils, hail, and locusts. Still Pharaoh’s refused to let the people go. “*Then the Lord said to Moses, Stretch out your hand toward heaven that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt – a darkness to be felt. Moses stretched out his hand – and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the people of Israel had light where they lived.*” But Pharaoh wouldn’t let the people go. He warned Moses, “*Leave me! Make sure you never see my face again, for on the day you see my face you will die. Moses replied, I will never see your face again*” (Ex. 10: 21-23 and 28-29). A tragic request. Pharaoh’s day of grace was over. He had committed the unpardonable sin. You will remember the next plague: the death of the firstborn. Thus, the plague of darkness was both God’s judgement on Egypt and the prelude to the death of Egypt’s firstborn.

I wonder if any that afternoon in Jerusalem were able to ‘*join the dots*’? Did it make them think? Did they see themselves in the same boat as the Egyptians? There are many parallels. They too had ignored all God’s previous signs and wonders that God had wrought through Jesus. How could they possibly miss this sign? It was also Passover. As in Egypt, so now in Jerusalem, this darkness was the

prelude to death – the death of God’s ‘*firstborn*’ Son. He would die as the Passover lamb so that his people might go free. He died that we might be redeemed. He died that we might be called, ‘*sons of God*’.

Second, consider the darkness as a sombre message from God the Father to His beloved Son.

The darkness was no surprise to Jesus. He knew it was coming. The Scriptures foreshadowed it - see e.g. Isaiah 13: 9-11, Joel 2: 1-2a, Amos 8: 9-10, and Ps. 22:2.

Since his arrest events had been escalating toward this moment. When the mob came with swords and clubs to arrest Jesus in the Garden he said to them, “*Every day while I was with you in the temple, you never laid a hand on me. But this is your hour – and the dominion of darkness*” (Luke 22: 53). This was Satan’s hour. The Prince of darkness was permitted to ‘reign’ for an hour. When Jesus was led away he submitted to the powers of darkness. He knew what was in store – treachery, rejection, injustice, irrational hatred and barbaric cruelty – from the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes.

Then at 9 am, after being scourged by the Roman soldiers, he was crucified. From 9 am until 12 noon he suffered on the Cross in broad daylight. It was witnessed by both friend and foe. This is important because there are those who deny the fact that Jesus was crucified - as do Muslims. They believe it was Simon of Cyrene or someone else. But the witness of history is clearly against them.

Then at 12 noon a sudden darkness descended; and for the next 3 hours Jesus suffering will be private and unseen. He will suffer as never before because the darkness coincided with his descent into hell. William Hendriksen comments, “Hell came to Calvary that day, and the Saviour descended into it and bore its horrors.” Klaas Schilder writes, “Human beings can mock and abuse; they can act unjustly and illegally; they can make a cross; but this is mere child’s play when compared to the materials of punishment which God now applies ... Beyond this point we cannot go because we cannot write of hell unless we have been there. We shall not strain to find words, God forbid. We cannot get beyond the word he used in his own teaching: outer darkness”.

Yes, hell came to Jesus on the Cross that afternoon. When Jesus was led out of the city gate to suffer he was treated as unclean thing. He was rejected by men. But now he was, as it were, led outside the gate of God, into outer darkness - rejected by God – and forsaken. This darkness was God’s signal to his Son that He must enter ‘the torture chamber of the universe’ and fulfil the covenant that would bring peace and salvation to His people.

Thirdly, the Lord is also speaking to you and me Christian friend through this darkness. Why did

Jesus suffer in the darkness? The only explanation is because of your sin and mine. Christ suffered the darkness that we deserve. He bore its horrors in our stead.

Why? Because he loved us. How great is that love! Paul declares, *'I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me'* (Gal. 2: 20).

The glory of the Gospel is that when we trust in Christ we are no longer under the power of darkness. Jesus declared, *'I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life'* (John 8: 12). Paul writes, *'He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son He loves'* (Col. 1: 13). Peter writes, *'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).

If this is what Jesus was suffering on the Cross – how dare we treat sin lightly.

Finally, is there not a word here for anyone who is not a Christian? The darkness is a warning, because hell is a place of darkness. Jesus often described it as, *'outer darkness and weeping and gnashing of teeth'* (Matt. 8: 12 and 22: 12 and 25: 30).

Most of us on when we're on our own are afraid (to some extent) of the dark. We hear every creak and movement. A night of darkness can be a long time. But hell is outer darkness for ever. That is terrifying. Yet that is the plight of everyone who lives and dies with their sins unforgiven. Sadly, men and women love darkness rather than light. How foolish. If you are not a Christian, why not? Jesus came into the world - not to condemn – it was already condemned – but to save it. He alone can turn your darkness into light. What was it that brought hope to those young boys trapped in the cave in Thailand? Was it not light? Jesus brings us hope and light and rescue because of what he suffered in the darkness. C. H. Spurgeon says that, *'the cross is the lighthouse which guides poor weather-beaten humanity into the harbour of peace'*.#

CENTENARY OF DAVIS MEMORIAL CHURCH

**41 Cameron Street, Wauchope, NSW.
Opened 29th August 1918.**

The celebration is to be held at 41 Cameron Street, Wauchope on Saturday **1st September 2018** at 1pm followed by afternoon tea. A booklet of about 12 pages is planned to be available. Contact Doug Hamilton for further details: Email: dsah1931@gmail.com Phone: 02 6586 1462

A Man After God's Own Heart?

G. W. van der Wal in *Una Sancta* 21 April 2019, magazine of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

Imagine the following scenarios taken from everyday life.

The first: A squabbling fight between two brothers turns into loud wailing as the youngest gets clobbered by his older sibling. Mum comes running and separates them. The oldest one cops an earful for picking on his smaller brother. He sullenly responds with: 'I've done nothing wrong. He started it first! You're always sticking up for him! He never gets into trouble for anything he does!'

The second: a school classroom. The teacher notices a female student accessing her smartphone during the lesson. She warns the student she will confiscate the mobile if she notices it again. The student initially denies looking at her phone and then complains loudly that she's always picking on her and doesn't notice that other students are also accessing their phones.

The Third: an elder questions a member about his increasing tendency to only attend worship service once on a Sunday. The member acts highly offended: 'What's so wrong with what I'm doing? Why are you coming down on me for something as insignificant as that? You should be checking on all those church members who are attending the nightclub every Saturday night. That's far more serious!'

The fourth: A church member becomes aware that a brother is drinking far more than he should at a function, to the extent that he becomes loud and obnoxious. He tries to raise his concerns to warn him, but the brother is scathing in his response: "Who do you think you are to criticise me! I can handle it! You just look at yourself – you're so self-righteous, aren't you!"

And the final one: After Adam and Eve had eaten from the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden, God seeks them out and asks Adam, 'Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?' Then the man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.' And the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' And the woman answered and said, 'The serpent beguiled me and I ate' (Gen 3:11b-13).

Why is it that we are often so unwilling to admit that we are wrong and so readily inclined to blame others or point the finger at others in an effort to justify our wrong behaviour?

Some years ago, I counselled a year 11 student after he admitted that he did spray obscene graffiti on the wall in the toilet after initially denying this. I asked him why he had been so adamant in denying it when I had caught him red-handed. Here are the reasons he gave: it was his automatic first line of defence when challenged; he didn't want to lose face in front of his peers; he was afraid of the consequences at school; he

was worried what his parents might say if they were told; he had done it many times before without getting caught.

I asked him if he was sorry that he had done it. His answer again was telling: 'I didn't think any teachers would come into the boys' toilet. I'm sorry I wasn't more careful, then I wouldn't have got caught.' As this wasn't the answer I was looking for, I asked if it was likely he would do this again. He answered, 'If it happens again, you'll blame me straight away, won't you?' As this still wasn't what I was aiming for, I asked him if he thought that what he had done was wrong. Again, his response was telling: *'Dad says it's only wrong if you get caught!'*

This was a state Senior High School. This sort of thing wouldn't happen in a John Calvin School – right? Maybe, but the scenarios above indicate that the same line of thinking is prevalent amongst us.

I believe that Adam and Eve gave a clear example of how mankind's thinking had degenerated after the fall into sin. There is no regard for others, and certainly no regard for God in the heart of fallen man. Man is a law unto himself and the only reason laws are observed is that there are penalties in place to safeguard those laws. For example, do we stick to the speed limit because we fear the consequences if we don't, or is it from a genuine desire to abide by all laws and a love for God's law as Psalm 119 teaches us so eloquently?

The cases of Saul and David

It's instructive to turn to Scripture and learn about this attitude in the lives of the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David. From our perspective the sins committed by Saul pale into insignificance when compared to the sins of David, yet we read that God rejected Saul from reigning over Israel whilst David was called a man after God's own heart. Saul's rejection by the LORD was first announced after he offered lame excuses to Samuel for not waiting the appointed time for sacrificing to the LORD (1Sam 13:11-12). First Samuel 15 informs us that after Saul had disobeyed the LORD's specific instructions to totally destroy Amalek, Samuel confronted him with his disobedience. Saul's response? Verse 20: "But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag, king of Amalek. But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things that should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal."

Does that sound familiar? Denial of wrong doing, blaming others, trying to justify your actions? But was really so bad when compared with the sins of David? In his sin with Bathsheba, David committed adultery, deception and murder. Surely these are far more serious sins than trying to cover up with a bit of blame shifting when you have been caught out doing the wrong thing by not sticking meticulously to God's commandments? Yet see where Saul's lack of true remorse and repentance leads him! All he was concerned about was his standing with the people and his kingship.

But let's compare David's response to being confronted with his sin, by Nathan the prophet in 2 Samuel 12:13. He said: "I have sinned against the LORD." He could have said, "But Bathsheba was flaunting herself, bathing openly where I could see her from my palace wall; she tempted me to sin with her. After all, I'm only a man and I became caught up in my passion for her. And why didn't Uriah accept my invitation to stay the night with his wife. Then nothing would have happened further. I am the king and I'm entitled to all the perks that royalty brings with it, aren't I? So, mind your own business, Nathan."

But David openly admits that he has sinned, not in the first place against Bathsheba and Uriah, but against the LORD. David realises that his sin is first and foremost a transgression of God's law. Psalm 51 gives us insight into David's anguish over his sins and how he had grieved the LORD. *"Have mercy upon me, O God!...Against you, you only have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight"* (51:1,4). He begs God in verse 11, *"Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me."* That's what David feared most of all. He couldn't bear the thought of life without God, although he knew that he deserved nothing less. He understood clearly and clung to the knowledge that "The sacrifices (that God delight in) are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart – these, O God, you will no despise."

There's a world of difference here between Saul's response and David's response. It was David's faith response that was pleasing in God's eyes so that Nathan could proclaim to him the forgiveness of his sins, though there would be sad and tragic consequences for himself and his sons. But the kingdom would not be taken away from him – and most importantly, David was reconciled with God again.

Do we also know of this anguish because of how we grieve our Heavenly Father with our sins? Perhaps we might be inclined to comment, "I haven't committed anything anywhere near as bad as David had." But then we miss the point entirely! God doesn't compare us to adulterers, murderers or even child molesters and then judge that we aren't nearly so bad. He compares us with himself. His absolute, holy character is the standard by which he measures our suitability for eternal life. Apart from Christ, everyone fails that standard because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). But the glorious truth of salvation is that Jesus Christ came down to earth to take our sins upon himself, paid our penalty by the accursed death on the cross and then bestowed on us the perfect righteousness he obtained for us. If only we believe this with a truly penitent and obedient heart! His Holy Spirit then empowers us to be sanctified, seeking to do his will with joy and delight so that we can truly sing these words of Psalm 119:60,

*See how I love and cherish your commands;
I follow them in all that I endeavour.
Preserve my life by your almighty hand;
O LORD, be mindful of your love and favour.
In all your words I see your truth maintained;
Each one of your decrees endures forever. #*

BOOK REVIEW

BE STILL MY SOUL Embracing God's purpose and provision in suffering Edited by Nancy Guthrie, published 2010 by IVP, 175pp. pbk.

Reviewed by Anna Ward

Many readers will be familiar with the name of Nancy Guthrie. I first became familiar with her writings some years ago when we were going through a particularly difficult time and friends sent me two of her books. They were a great help in bringing healing. She also has Bible study guides and Knox Ladies' Bible Study is currently going through 'Seeing Jesus in Genesis' and finding it very helpful.

Be Still My Soul, like several other of her books, deals with suffering and Nancy Guthrie explains at the beginning how her own suffering through the deaths of two children has led her to have a ministry in this area to help others.

This book is a compilation by 25 writers, each of whom uses a verse of Scripture as the base for his or her theme. The writers have quite different approaches – some bring solace; others stress that our peace with God comes through the suffering of Christ for our sins; others focus on our need for trials to prepare us for heaven. All are firmly Biblical and all point us to Christ. Among the writers are Philip Yancey, Os Guinness, John Calvin, Helen Roseveare, Thomas Manton, J.I. Packer, R.C Sproul; Corrie Ten Boom and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Here are summaries of the chapters of two writers:

Joni Eareckson Tada was born in 1949 in USA and is now 68. She became a quadriplegic at 17 after diving into shallow water. Very dark days followed the accident, but eventually she was able to say, *"I really would rather be in this wheelchair knowing Jesus than on my feet without him"*. Her chapter is based on Genesis 50:20 (*You intended to harm me, but God meant it for good*).

Joni says she first read the book of Job just after her accident. She thought that if God and Satan were involved in her accident at all, then Satan had twisted God's arm for permission and God had to run behind Satan with a repair kit. She thought that by being disabled she had missed God's best for her and that God was forced to go with a 'Divine Plan B'.

Many people probably think this about their suffering, assuming that Satan's schemes throw a monkey wrench into God's plans, catching Him off-guard. However, the truth is very different. God is infinitely more powerful than Satan. In Job, it was not God who nervously went along with Satan's plan, but it was God who introduced the subject with Satan. God was in control, he would

thwart the devil and Job's suffering (and Joni's) was 'God's Plan A'.

Our suffering is to uproot sin from our lives, make us more like Christ and bond us to Him - 1st Peter 2:21 (*To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*) God does not delight in our suffering, but permits things to happen of which he does not approve, and he brings good out of it. One form of evil, suffering, is turned on its head to defeat another form of evil, my sin. God permits what he hates, to accomplish what he loves - Christ in me, the hope of glory. God's Plan A, not Plan B!

A.W. Tozer (1897-1963), who was a minister in the Christian and Missionary Alliance in US. He quotes Samuel Rutherford, the Scottish minister and commissioner to the Westminster Assembly, who in the midst of serious trials, said, "Praise God for the hammer, the file and the furnace".

How could Rutherford find it in his heart to praise God for the hammer, the file and the furnace? The answer is that he worshipped the Lord who used these things for the everlasting blessing of his children and he had walked with God in the furnace.

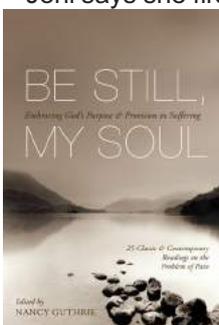
This does not find much sympathy with Christians today. We tend to think of Christianity as a painless system to escape the penalty of past sins and reach heaven. The flaming desire to be rid of every unholy thing and to put on the likeness of Christ at any cost is not often found among us. We expect to enter the everlasting kingdom of our Father and to sit down with saints and martyrs and through the grace of God, we shall. But it is necessary for God to use the hammer, the file and the furnace to prepare us for sainthood. We have become too soft. Salvation has come to mean deliverance from unpleasant things, we expect consolation and pleasantness and overlook the thorns, the cross and the blood. God uses these to cleanse His child. Thank God for the furnace!

The chapters in the book are easy to read and short, each only a few pages long. My copy is on Audible, where the chapters last between 7 and 12 minutes and the whole book runs for 4 hours and 42 minutes. Because the chapters are independent, you can dip into the book at any point. The printed copy costs about \$14 and is readily available.

The cover of the book could be brighter and more attractive, but the contents are well worth while reading.

I'll give Spurgeon the last word:

"You do not test a ship's seaworthiness by examining it in the docks, but by taking it out to sea. We need trial as a test as much as we need divine truth for food. Instead of being sorry about it, count it as all joy."



CAMPS

The **Brisbane Family Camp** is at Camp Drewe, Lennox Head Friday 7 to Monday 10 December 2018. Registration from \$40 per night.

The church-wide **PCEA Family Camp** will be held at Elanora Heights, Sydney 1 to 4 January 2019. Approx \$240 (adult) \$210 (child) The Speaker will be Rev Andres Miranda.

Family rates are available for both camps. Details from Stewart Carswell scarswell@optusnet.com.au 07 3397 1138

ISLAM in England and Australia

In England about 3 million or nearly 5% of the population is Muslim, and by far the largest ethnicity is of Pakistani or Bangladeshi descent. It is not surprising that Muslims are two or three times over-represented in the prison population, a fact which is surely not unrelated to the very low economic status of the Muslim population as a whole with per head wealth a fifth of most of the rest of the population. Complicating efforts to integrate Muslim migrants is the fact that they tend to concentrate in London and major cities like Leeds and Bradford. In Bradford about 25% of the population is Muslim. The relative strength of Islam and Christianity in England is illustrated by the fact that the number of Anglicans and Muslims actually attending worship is about the same. However, there are significant Christian groups outside Anglicanism, and it is suggested that there are about 25,000 converts from Islam to Christianity, mainly in evangelical or Pentecostal churches.

In Australia the Muslim proportion of the population is about 2.5% of the population or 600,000 people. There are many parallels with England although the backgrounds here are more varied with Turks and Lebanese the larger of nearly 70 ethnicities.

In both countries a significant proportion are not practising Muslims. It remains to be seen whether the liberalising of some laws in Saudi Arabia will have wider impact. Certainly, Saudi promotion through petro-dollars of the Wahabbi sect of Islam, out of which much extremism has arisen, may come under some pressure as the Saudi rulers adopt a new economic strategy. #

NEWS OF CHURCHES

May and June saw a number of Christian denominations hold their Assemblies.

The **Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia**, our close sister church, met for their Annual Presbytery at the McKinnon Church. Overall numbers attending are down a bit in Geelong while public worship at



South Frankston work is in *obeyance* with members encouraged to attend at McKinnon, the only other Melbourne congregation. Since the Presbytery meeting, the McKinnon manse has been sold and the plan is a thorough renovation of the church building and the investment of some of the proceeds in a property in the western suburbs against future church planting. (The Rev Graeme Hart, the energetic minister at McKinnon, supplies his own accommodation.)

The **Christian Reformed Churches of Australia** held their triennial Synod at Langwarrin (Vic) at which I represented the PCEA and was made very welcome. The CRCA faces many of the same issues that other conservative denominations face. The thoroughness of the Reports was noteworthy. One sensed a certain lack of cohesion not helped by the lack of a denominational magazine of recent years. There is some variance of practice already in the attitude toward admitting covenant children to the Lord's Supper, and this subject will be examined for the next Synod due in 2021. One is certainly impressed with a very intentional focus for outreach and church growth.

The **Free Church of Scotland** Assembly in May was attended by our delegate, the Rev. Robin Tso of the Hunter, who had opportunity to address the meeting, and all reports say that he spoke well. It is encouraging to see respect for sound doctrine although disappointing that the traditional worship practice, changed in 2010, is not widely observed. Through generation-mission.org the church aims to develop churches, equip people and plant new churches in Scotland and across the world.

The **Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)** which broke away from the Free Church in 2000 because of dissatisfaction with a disciplinary matter seems to have largely moved on. The claim of a right of continued Protest as a fundamental principle of the church, which

was the point contended for, was rejected by the civil courts and, while still maintained by the FCSC in a recent published history, does not seem to be an issue most ministers would want to argue about. Mr Tso was well received at the FCSC Assembly and the possibility of some more formal relationship (there is none at present) should be considered.

Mr Tso also made contact with the small **Associated Presbyterian Churches**, whose Assembly was held in Inverness, and addressed their meeting. In doctrine and practice they would be identical to the PCEA and pleasant fellowship was held.

Mr Tso was able to takes services in each the three denominations mentioned above. Meanwhile, the Scottish religious scene is very poor overall, as the large, although rapidly declining, **Church of Scotland** General Assembly of May 2018 voted by 345 votes to 170 to instruct their Legal Questions Committee to draft Church legislation, for consideration in 2 years, to allow Ministers who wish to, to conduct same-sex marriages. Back in 2009 the COS had ratified the appointment of an openly homosexual minister and has since approved ministers performing civil partnerships.

Our sister in the USA, the **Orthodox Presbyterian Church**, held its 85th General Assembly at Wheaton College, Illinois concurrently with the Synod of the **United Reformed Churches of North America**. At



The Ladies' craft group Ulverstone PCEA

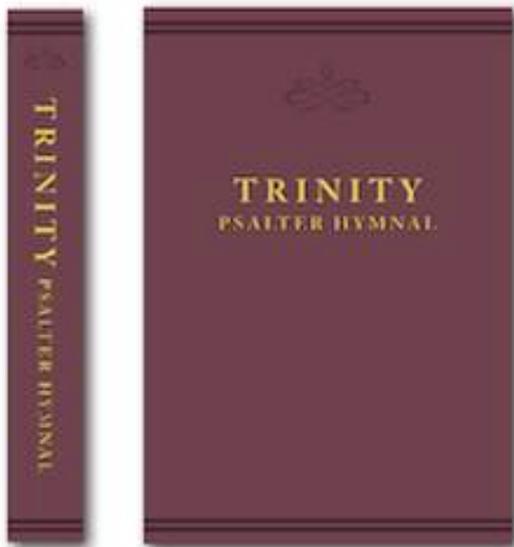


CARRUM DOWNS

Three months in our new building are past. It is encouraging to have a number of new faces in the congregation already. The Rev David Kumnick still is experiencing poor health but has been able to worship in the congregation several times in the last 3 months. Please keep him and Josée in your prayers. Of recent weeks Jim and Jean from Queensland have been with us while staying with family.

NOTE TO CORRESPONDENTS

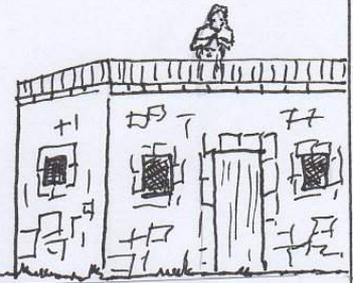
The Presbyterian Banner can be a helpful means of building relationships and cohesion across our congregations. However, we are not receiving much news for the magazine. Please consider providing an update of your congregation with a few pictures.



this meeting the Trinity Psalter-Hymnal, begun by the OPC in 2006 and supported by the URCA in 2012 (who had been working on a similar project), was launched. I am yet to see a complete copy but judging from the amount of effort expended this will a fine production, and because all the Psalms have been included, useful in furthering use of Scripture in worship. Already 30,000 copies have been sold. The OPC also appointed a Committee to prepare a linguistic updating of the church's doctrinal standards, which in their present form are included in the Psalter-Hymnal.# *RSW*

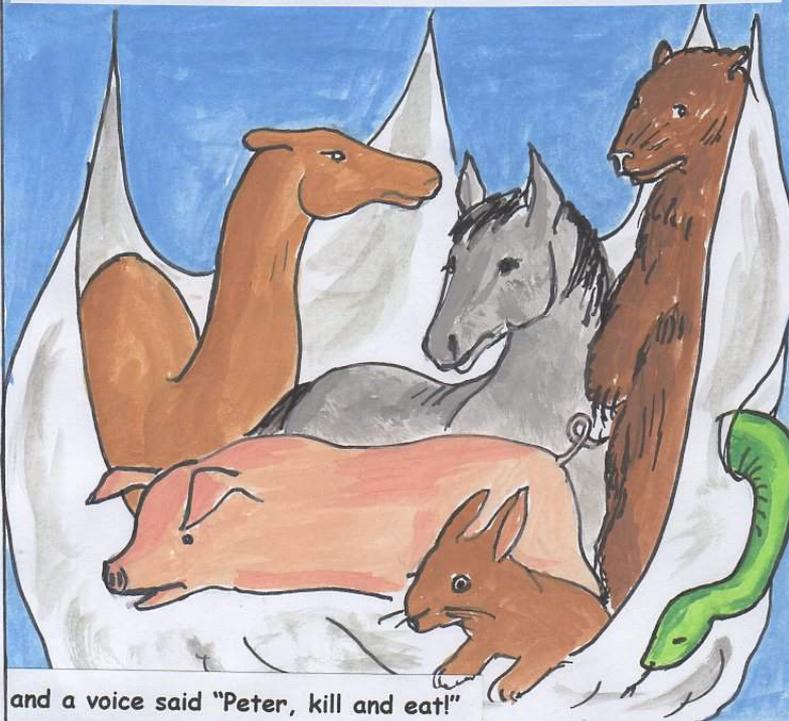
Cornelius calls for Peter.

A centurion called Cornelius was told by an angel to send for Peter.



Peter was on a rooftop in Joppa, praying.

There he had a very strange vision: three times a sheet came down from heaven full of all sorts of animal, birds and reptiles.



and a voice said "Peter, kill and eat!"



Peter said "No Lord, I've never eaten anything unclean!"



Just then the men sent by Cornelius arrived.

The next day Peter went with them to meet Cornelius, his family and his friends.



Peter was amazed that these people believed in Jesus. The vision was a sign that all people from all nations can come to Jesus.