

The Presbyterian Banner

November 2018



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FROM THE EDITOR

There have been plenty of ethical issues in the news this past month.

Refugees

The word 'refugee' entered the English language as a name for exiled French Protestants. As the definitive Oxford English Dictionary puts it:

'A Protestant who fled France to seek refuge elsewhere from religious persecution in the 17th and 18th centuries, esp. following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685.'

There are refugees fleeing religious persecution today. There are also refugees who have reached safety but want to go somewhere they think better. Who can blame them? Yet at the same time many have languished for years in refugee camps less secure than Manus Island. Do they not deserve consideration? The issues can be complex but we need refugees off Manus. The mess has been reduced by the present Government but it needs to be cleared up once and for all.

Greed

Small business is apparently often not paying the required superannuation contributions for its employees. If this isn't a criminal offence it should be. It's theft. I've mentioned the unethical behaviour of banks and financial institutions previously. As a result of the exposure by the Royal Commission, a credit squeeze reminding me of that in 1966 looms. There could be hardship for many, perhaps complicated by a decline in housing prices in our major capitals themselves by the too ready availability of credit.

Yet we cannot ignore that borrowers have a responsibility too when they accept offered credit and make investments in the hope of profit. If things don't turn out so well they can't automatically put all the blame on the banks.

Pay rates

There can be no doubt that women have overall come off poorly whether as regards equal pay for equal work or being subject to abuse. One can understand an earlier situation where the man was the sole breadwinner because Mum had Monday for washing, Tuesday for ironing, Wednesday for mending, Thursday for cleaning, Friday for shopping, Saturday for baking and every day for cooking and managing the children, and with Sunday for rest.

Violence against women

The issue of violence against women, physical or sexual remains a big issue. The Me-Too movement is an understandable reaction but it has its own serious problems. Strikingly, this is evident in the case of the nomination of Judge Brett Kavanaugh to the US Supreme Court (since narrowly confirmed). Admittedly appointments to public office in the US are politicised in a way foreign to Australia, but the fact that even law students at Harvard, doubtless future judicial leaders among them, ignored due process and judged him guilty, while the other side judged him innocent, is a worrying sign.

While on the one hand we have a general trashing of decency, honesty, compassion, respect for office and for the rule of law, we also have a kind of new perfectionism that allows no redemption, no forgiveness. A recovery of the Gospel is our great need. Pray and labour to that end.

Australian subs for 2019 have been reduced by \$5 as our financial position justifies it. Please note the new bank details in the panel below.

The correct title of the book I mentioned last month by historians Stuart Piggin and Robert Linder, is *The Fountain of Public Prosperity – Evangelical Christians in Australian History 1740-1914* (Monash University Press, 2018)

The Presbyterian Banner [ISSN 0729-3542] is the official magazine of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. The PCEA was founded in 1846 and adheres to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) as a correct summary of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. There are congregations in Woolloowin (Brisbane), Qld.; Maclean, Grafton, Wauchope, Kindee, Taree, Cardiff, Raymond Terrace, Sydney CBD, Mt Druitt in NSW; Wantirna, Mulgrave, Narre Warren, Carrum Downs, Geelong in Vic.; Ulverstone, Tas.

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Responding in a Time of Testing

Many Christians in China fear they are now entering a “tumultuous time.” Recent news reports highlight prominent cases of authorities pressuring and even closing churches, prompting Christians to fear these actions are steps in a greater government movement against their faith. How should Christians respond in the increasingly tense environment? In this article, sourced from <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/chinese-church-voices/responding-in-a-time-of-testing> Brother Liu stresses the need to hold a peaceful rather than confrontational stance toward the government. He also cautions Christians not to promote rumours that stir up agitation. He reminds readers that the church has withstood persecution before and will do so again.

There are important lessons also for Australian Christians.

In a Time of Testing and Persecution, Do Not Be Moved by Rumours, Nor Stir Up Confidence in the Flesh

Recently, some churches in Henan have been demolished, and it seems the Chinese church is once again entering a tumultuous time. The suffering of the church is of course heartbreaking. However, at the same time, some people are surreptitiously creating and spreading rumours, and others are proposing unrealistic solutions. The resulting confusion is very serious and harmful, adding sleet on top of snow.

Recently people have been forwarding a message online saying that the current demolition campaign is the action of a certain communist party official at a local level who is now under investigation. It looks like a victory that boosts our confidence a bit. Some Christians have no discernment, so they blindly forward it, rushing to share, even “with hallelujahs” and “praise the Lords.”

However, if you analyse it, this “insider information” doesn’t mention any reliable source, and if you search online, there is no related news. Also, this content does not contain much common sense. It is clearly a rumour, drawn up behind the scenes by who knows who. But many Christians blindly forward it, once again exposing a bruising lack of discernment.

Around the same time, there were two short videos circulating online. Some people call them: “The Strategy for the Henan Church to Be Strong and Courageous.” It looks like they could really

“boost troop morale.” But they have stirred up quite a bit of controversy and confusion. These two short videos were both created by a Christian named Cao Nan, who hails from somewhere in Shang Qiu, Henan province. In the video, this Brother Cao claims his group, the Joshua Evangelism Band, came to Shang Qiu in Henan to stand with the persecuted church, and then he gives a “Strategy for the Church to Be Victorious” and calls on churches everywhere to follow this example.

He says that Christians are to be victorious over persecution, and it is useless to just rely on prayer and holding discussions online. “We have only one way, which is for brothers and sisters to be strong and courageous, and to go out, walk to the square in front of the main government building, worship there, pray there, make declarations there, dance there. As long as brothers and sisters all boldly go out there, in the towns, the districts, and the city squares; and pray, worship, sing psalms and praises, then those who are persecuting us will be afraid, and the church will restore the cross and hold meetings freely.” (This is a paraphrase.)

Brother Cao’s courage is commendable, but his “Strategy for the Church to Be Victorious” has caused confusion for some brothers and sisters, and has even caused controversy.

Encouraging brothers and sisters to go to the government square to dance and sing and worship—is this the normal way for Christians to gather? Or does it reduce worshipping God to a means of “resistance” and “pressurization?” Would this extreme response to persecution mix faith and politics, reducing worship to a means to political ends? Would it even use ordinary brothers and sisters as a “weapon” in their hands, forgetting the apostolic teachings?

1 Peter 3:13-16 says:

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame.

This passage of Scripture gives us very good guidance for how to face persecution.

Firstly, when Christians are persecuted for their faith, the Bible definitely says we are blessed and furthermore tells us not to be afraid. But the Bible definitely does not want us to use this as an excuse to confrontationally deter our persecutors, manifesting a courage that is of flesh and blood. In contrast, the Bible encourages and exhorts us, the more we are persecuted, the more we must live out

a beautiful testimony, that witnessing our holy character, our persecutors would feel ashamed when seeing our godly character. For Christians, this is a very challenging lesson.

Compared to “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone with gentleness and respect,” maybe it is much easier to dance, praise and worship in the square, but have we considered this: to what extent can these actions testify to our faith and spread the gospel; what are the consequences? Would it cause disturbances, would it hinder the order of traffic, and end up actually losing the testimony we should have? To quote one brother’s comment from a WeChat group, “For the government square, it is just having one more Christian-themed square dance.”

Four years ago, I observed a church that had organised an “Aerobics Praise Dance” in the square. For a time, every night twenty-some ladies from that church would go to a small public square to do their “aerobics praise dance” using praise and worship music. They originally intended to share the gospel, but it later evolved into just another type of public square dance. Sure it was accompanied by Christian music, but it had nothing to do with evangelism. Later, the church cancelled its “Aerobics Praise Dance” activity.

Therefore, on the surface, this Brother Cao’s proposal looks very “strong and courageous,” but it is an unrealistic and blind action. Responding to persecution in this aggressive way might bring worse consequences, losing the testimony that Christians should have. The current situation is indeed very serious. In persecution, we are not to be afraid, but we are also to be shrewd. We cannot respond and “overcome” persecution using methods of flesh and blood, and we certainly must not forget the power of prayer in our quiet closet. “For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh.” (2 Corinthians 10:3)

When we face forced demolitions, we are saddened by it, but we must not lose a heart of calmness, patience, and prayer; and we really must not hate those who persecute us. Christians also need to understand the law. They can try their best to fight for themselves in a legal way, to defend themselves, and even to hire a lawyer and go to court. However, using extreme methods to “stand up for their rights” and “eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth” might backfire. Because the Bible commands us, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” (Luke 6:27-28)

Taking a step back, even if the crosses are demolished, the church buildings are taken over, the churches completely lose their property rights, does that mean our faith is all over? We have a retreat: as long as we have the cross in our hearts, can we not

worship God in our homes? Are we unable to “love our neighbours” starting with those around us? During the Cultural Revolution, all church buildings were closed down. Was that “game over” for the Chinese Christian church? No, they actually prospered in another form. Jesus showed us another way to move forward when facing intense persecution that you can no longer bear. We have a way out, as Jesus told us, “When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next.” (Matthew 10:23)

Jesus did not say here that when you are persecuted, you are to confront the conflict directly and fight back to the end. No, this is not the way! When Jesus was hanging on the cross, he could have appealed to his father to send him more than twelve legions of angels to annihilate his enemies, but he did not do so; he silently endured. Would we say that Jesus was acting cowardly? No, he was victorious in his apparent weakness!

In the successive persecutions of the ancient Roman Empire for three hundred years, Christians faced persecution in this way. They did not regard the Roman Empire as an enemy, nor did they think of subverting the Roman Empire, but with gentleness, patience, and reverent hearts, they responded to all scheming and persecution. When their houses were confiscated, or when they were driven out, or when their church properties were taken over, even when they were executed, they steadfastly held to their faith; they did not make the Roman Empire out as the enemy. But they strove to obey Jesus’ teachings as best they could on this earth, and lived out a lovely testimony (see American author [Rodney] Stark’s book, *The Rise of Christianity*).

Therefore, in the face of today’s difficult situation, Christians must remain calm and prayerful.

In your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience.

Finally, I want to conclude with a paragraph from another brother:

When you face persecution, you must be patient and calm. Don’t act out of your flesh, don’t be stirred up by others, and definitely don’t be ignorant and confused. Be shrewd, pray for those who persecute you, answer others with a gentle and respectful heart, rely on the great power of the Holy Spirit to say what should be said, be patient. Make sure you do not slander, curse, resist with force.

I think, this should be how a true Christian acts in the face of persecution:

Strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22) #

Suffer the Little Children

Archibald J. Bogle

Like many, your editor likes researching family history. In recent research into one branch of the family I came across a cutting from I believe a Wesleyan paper (for the Waterhouse family were keen Methodists) about the death of a little boy, William Towers Waterhouse, in 1883, a child of my great grandfather. In fact it was a children's address given by the Rev. A. J. Bogle (1840-89) a Scot who opened up Wesleyan work in Darwin in 1873 but also served at Glenelg, South Australia 1878-80. Sure, it's a bit dated (death in infancy is nowhere near as frequent today) but it's also moving and real, for death still comes to all. Here it is.

On Sunday the 14th of April 1878, I first saw a fair little boy of four years old, with a bright intelligent face and long flaxen ringlets, standing in the Glenelg schoolroom. It was his birthday, and he was eagerly listening to a Sunday-school address which I was giving about Abijah, the good little son of King Jeroboam, who fell sick and died [1 Kings 14]. I told the children that though Abijah's father was a great king, although his mother loved him so much and did everything she could for him, yet they could not keep him alive. Then I asked, "Why do you think God allowed him to die? Was it because he was angry with him?" Oh! no. It was because he loved him. He was God's little boy and God wanted him to have him home in heaven, so he sent his servant Death to fetch him. After the address we sang, and I specially noticed this little fair boy singing with all his heart, "I wish that His hands had been laid on my head/that his arms had been thrown around me,/and that I might have heard His kind voice when he said,/"Let the little ones come unto me." Well!

During three years I never missed that little face from among the children at the monthly children's service, and hardly a day passed when I did not hear his little feet pattering through my house as he came to ask me some of the curious questions which seemed to be always arising in his active mind.

I used to think that he would grow up to be a wise, good and useful man, but the other day when the postman came, he brought a black-lined card with these words: "In loving remembrance of 'Our Willie'".

So now I know that my little friend has gone where "many dear children are gathering." I shall never see that little face on earth again, and he knows now far more than I could tell him. I am asked to write something about Willie, and I do so not only that those who knew and loved him so dearly may have it to read, but because I hope it will do good to some of you, my dear boys and girls, to hear about a little boy, of your own age, who loved Jesus and went to heaven.

Just about Christmas time, Willie, with some of my nephews and nieces who live in Tasmania, went out to a lovely place for a picnic, and enjoyed themselves very much. While playing, however, poor Willie hurt himself. It did not seem much, but afterwards, like Abijah, he "fell sick" and suffered dreadfully. [It was tetanus.] But though in such pain, you can't think how patient and good he was, how grateful and loving to his sorrowful friends. His own papa and mama were far away, but he had a grandfather and a grandmother and a kind aunt, who oved him dearly and did all they could for him. On Saturday night he was so ill that he went to bed with his aunt and said to her "You'll keep hold of my hand, Auntie, won't you, and read to me out of the Bible?" So she held his dear hand, and read and spoke to him nearly all that night. On Sunday morning he was worse and could not rise. So he said, "You'll stay home with me today, Auntie, won't you; and ask Grandpa to have prayer up here, then I can have it too." So poor Grandpa came, to read to his little boy, and Willie said "Grandpa, please read about Jesus healing the blind and the lame." He was able to read for himself, and was always fond of reading and hearing these beautiful Bible stories, so that he knew all about what Jesus had done when he was here upon earth. His Grandmama said "What did Jesus say about the little children, dear?" And he looked at her and answered prettily, "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not," and then they all sang with him "Jesus loves me this I know/for the Bible tells me so/little ones to him belong/they are weak but he is strong." And that was true. Jesus did love him. Though his parents and friends loved him dearly, Jesus loved him better than all. And so, my dear children, *on that very night*, the last night of the Old Year, *Jesus came*, and took "our Willie" away to spend his New Year's Day in Heaven. Oh! what a happy little boy he must have been when Our Heavenly Father wiped away all the tears from his face, and he saw Jesus, and the glorious angels, and met with the many dear children who are gathering there, for *Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.* #

SEARCH WORK

NOVEMBER 2018

SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE

Intermediate omit questions 2 and 5

REVELATION chapter 15

1. What song did they sing who had the victory over the beast? (2 verses)

Chapter 16

2. What happened when the seventh angel poured his vial [bowl] into the air? (2 verses only)

Chapter 17

3. What was the name written on the forehead of the woman sitting on the scarlet coloured beast?

4. Why will the Lamb overcome the ten kings who make war with the Lamb?

Chapter 18

5. What did the angel say when he threw the great millstone into the sea? (1 verse only)

Chapter 19

6. In what clothing was the Lamb's wife to be arrayed?

7. What is the description of him who sat on the white horse? (3 verses)

8. Where were the beast and the false prophet cast?

JUNIOR

GENESIS chapter 22

1. What did the Lord command Abraham to do to his son Isaac?

2. What was Abraham's answer when Isaac asked: Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

3. When Abraham lifted up his eyes, what did he see caught in a thicket?

4. What did the angel of the Lord say when he called to Abraham from heaven the second time? (3 verses)

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

CAN WE APOLOGISE FOR WHAT OTHERS HAVE DONE?

An historic national apology for the sexual abuse of children in the care of churches and other institutions was delivered by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition on Monday 22 October 2018. It is to be welcomed as was the apology to the 'stolen generations' in 2008. However, some may question whether one can apologise for what others have done. Perhaps the answer may be found in several lines of argument.

A parent may rightly apologise for the actions of a child who misbehaves since the parent has a responsibility for the child even though the actions are those of the child and not the parent. Similarly, an institution that has continuity despite changes in the people in control continues to have a corporate responsibility for past wrong actions. Hence the apology for the 'stolen generations' that was made on behalf of Parliament in 2008 is right since Parliament passed laws that facilitated it or failed to pass laws preventing it. An endeavour to make redress is also appropriate in these circumstances. Churches or other institutions that ignored sexual abuse are rightly responsible. The case in regard to individual employees or representatives will depend on circumstances though there will be at least apology in the sense of regret.

When it comes to individuals the situation is more complex. If we have not personally committed the abuse and have always repudiated such acts, our apology will be because we know we are nevertheless part of a sinful race, and to that extent part of the human problem. Our apology is an expression of deep sorrow in this case. If we have committed the abuse or identify with the attitudes of former generations that produced it, or ignored it when we knew of it, our apology needs to be heartfelt and sincere with a personal willingness to face the consequences, financial or otherwise.

A complicating factor in the present time is the rampant individualism of Western societies that has lost sight of common values through the breakdown of consensus as to what these are. At the same time that we rightly recognise the identity of the child and that such should be protected from abuse we have considerable pressure at the moment to be able to define one's own identity, including our sexuality regardless of gender. Leaving aside genuine cases of uncertain sexuality we have unloosed the Pandora's box of me and my desires over against the proper recognition of our identity as humans grounded in the creative purpose of God. Dissatisfied with what we have received at birth we add another form of abuse by encouraging its rejection.- RSW

‘Father, I will....’

Rev Arthur Allen (1902-58)*

Arthur Allen was an able minister of the church at Geelong 1938-44 and at St George's Sydney, 1944-58.

‘Father, I will...’ John 17:24

When an individual by faith acknowledges the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour, he does so in response to the Lord’s invitation. ‘Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give thee rest.’ The invitation goes out to all. To the broken-hearted, to the disappointed and discouraged, to those who are dissatisfied with a life where all its bright prospects are swallowed up in death and the great gulf of eternity. Therefore, when the Gospel comes to men, it is indeed the message of Salvation to the world weary and to those whose souls long to aspire to the lofty spheres of eternal life. And even though our faith be faint and wavering, that is no barrier to our accepting the invitation of the Lord Jesus Christ, for Christ invites all to come who are willing to trust him. There you have the one and only qualification, ‘A willing heart’. But it is presumption and sin for any whose qualifications consist in their own good works or their own self-righteousness. The invitation is to sinners, and only to those who recognise themselves as such, and depend wholly upon the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary.

Just before entering the Garden of Gethsemane for the last time, the Lord prayed for his disciples, and not for them alone, but for all who should believe on him through their word. And I would call your attention to one of the petitions of that prayer. ‘Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am: that they may behold my glory, etc.’

The nature of the petition

In the first place, let us consider the first three words, ‘Father I will’. How different is the expression of this petition when compared with the prayer offered just a little later in the Garden of Gethsemane. ‘Nevertheless not my will, but thy will be done.’ The distinction consists in this, that in the first petition he is praying for others as their Saviour and their Lord, revealing the covenant relationship that exists between the Father and himself. In the second place,

he is praying for himself, as the substitute of man, whose sin he is bearing.

The petition ‘Father, I will’ reveals the deity of Christ, equal with the Father in power and glory. The Lord is not pleading for the recognition of his claims, but stating exactly what he requires, or desires. He does not use words of authority nor yet of condescension, but he speaks with God the Father as an equal. The will of the Father differs in no way from the will of the Son. It is the Son’s delight to do the will of Father, and it is the Father’s joy to fulfil the will of the Son. If we turn to the second Psalm will see the reason why the Lord Jesus Christ framed his petition in such a way: ‘Ask of me and for heritage the heathen I’ll make thine, and for possession I to thee will give earth’s utmost line.’ There is no other prayer in the Holy Scripture that conveys the calm majesty and dignity of this petition. - ‘Father, I will.’

The boldest words of Jacob, who prevailed and had power with God, were: ‘I will not let thee go except thou bless me.’ As you see, these are the words of one that pleads for God’s favour. The Apostle Paul was a man who lived close to God and was highly favoured, having been caught up to the third heaven and seen things that it is not lawful for man to utter: yet he says, ‘I bow my knees to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’. The Lord Jesus Christ alone could use such a petition as ‘Father, I will’, because he was God’s fellow and equal. ‘He thought it not robbery to be equal with God’, for he was in the beginning, and the world was made for and by him. ‘Ere the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy’ Christ had entered into a covenant relationship with the Father; that he would redeem a people from the wrath to come. For that reason he assumed our nature and suffered on the cross. Thus in the petition he speaks to God the Father with reference to the agreement settled before the world was. He speaks as one who has fulfilled his part of that agreement, saying ‘Father, I will’. But in the fulfilling of that agreement he says, ‘Thy will be done.’

In the petition of Christ the poor sinner can take courage and look forward with assurance to his eternal redemption, as our salvation does not rest upon what we have accomplished, but upon what Christ has done. The unerring dignity of this petition brings life and light to the soul. The Lord Jesus Christ stands in our room and stead. He is dealing with the Father and the Father is dealing with him, and it is upon the outcome of that agreement between the Father and the Son on which our Salvation depends. Thus the petition of Christ reveals that full agreement has been reached, and to us the invitation of the Gospel comes. [cont....

* From *The Australian Free Presbyterian*, January 1949

The content of the petition

The continuation of the petition of Christ is, 'that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am'. These words bring fresh light into the soul of man, for they unfold the unity of the Godhead in the purpose of man's redemption. The Father has an equal claim with the Son with regard to the redeemed, who shall inhabit the courts of eternal light in the kingdom of heaven. It reveals that it was the Father who gave them to the Son. 'Thine they were, but thou gavest them me'. Thus the Father and the Son are united in their claims, for the Lord said, 'All mine are thine and thine are mine.' In the eternal Salvation of the sinner whose trust is in the finished work of Jesus Christ is the great purpose of the Godhead. The Father's love for the redeemed is not one wit the less than that of the Son. It was because God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son into the world. And it was because Christ loved us that he gave himself for us. Therefore it was divine love that moved both heaven and earth for man's salvation.

It is the will of both the Father and the Son, that the redeemed should be with him where he is. And Christ will not be satisfied until that union is perfect in heaven. The Father's favour is also revealed, when Christ tells of the great day of consummation, saying, 'Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the earth'. Then shall Christ see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.

The reason Christ's petition is granted

And finally, we would come to the reason why Christ's petition shall be granted unto him. 'For thou lovest me before the foundation of the world.' Before angels or any of the heavenly hosts sang the praises of the glory of the Godhead, the Father loved the Son, and the Son loved the Father. In the light of their own glory inaccessible, their love was mutual, when there was no eye to see or lip to praise. And when God the Father spoke to the inhabitants of the earth, he said, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' On more than one occasion God broke the silence of heaven to declare his love for the Son. There is a sense in which the Son shares this love with the redeemed for he says, 'That the love where with thou hast loved me, may be in them and I in them.' So when we hear the Gospel, let our feeble faith be strengthened. For we come not in our own strength, nor do we come because we think ourselves worthy. We are saved because of the love that the Father bears to the Son; and the mutual love of the Godhead is extended to us: 'While we were yet enemies Christ died.' Let us then discard our self-effort, and seek redemption only in the love of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

oOo



**Dr Andrew
Bannister of the UK
spoke at Melbourne
School of Theology
recently on the
Qur'an**

This was a well attended meeting. Bannister has a background in computer science and a PhD in Islamic studies. There are many questions about the origin of the Qur'an which, on the traditional Muslim view, is a compilation of messages given by God to an illiterate man named Muhammad from 610 to his death in 632, and forming a perfect earthly copy of the Qur'an in heaven, and therefore beyond human criticism. There were texts judged deviant texts but these were destroyed and the text was fixed about 655.

Compare with the above the Biblical picture of God using men of his choosing to give his word and preserving the same, by special providence not miracle, in the multiplicity of copies so that in any doubt the original can be found in careful manuscript comparison - not that any truth has been corrupted or doctrine dropped out.

Bannister is part of an international team of scholars from various religious traditions which is preparing a data-base enabling detailed analysis of the text of the Qur'an. It enables one to instantly locate particular words or phrases and also to compare various manuscripts of the Qur'an which show variations. Instead of taking impossibly long times to do manually, now such research can be done at the touch of a button. The computer has been used to do similar things in regard to the Biblical texts for a long time but this is a first for the Qur'an.

Apart from being a great tool for Qur'anic studies it is highlighting problems with the traditional viewpoint. We really don't know anything much about Muhammad (if he's mentioned in the Quran at all it's a maximum of four times), but if he was illiterate that does not mean he was not part of a rich oral culture in which stories are told and retold employing over and over again stock phrases and expressions. An English parallel might be 'Once upon a time' or, for the younger among us, using LOL at the end of a text message. The result of the work done indicates very clearly, according to Bannister, that the Qur'an is the product of an oral culture. Thus the story of Iblis and Adam, told seven times in the Qur'an, has the same basic story but each time is told somewhat differently. The Qur'an, a word meaning 'recitation' did not drop from heaven as a wholly divine word. These findings provide serious challenges for the traditional account of Qur'anic origins which will be difficult for more traditional Muslims to accept. # - RSW

Lutherans before Luther?

1. Wycliffe & the Lollards

Rowland S Ward

In much popular Protestant writing, there has been a tendency—more than a tendency—to see Lutherans before Luther. In any discussion of Luther's influence one has to keep in mind that there *were* forerunners to the Reformation who shared in part the ideas of Luther. Reformation in the Western Church did not start on 31 October 1517. Nevertheless, one must avoid reading Luther back into precursors like Wycliffe and Hus.¹ The aim of this article is to provide a corrective to popular accounts by drawing on the scholarship of recent decades in an overview of the subject.

John Wycliffe (c.1330–1384)² believed that clergy should not hold property, and near the end of his life held that the doctrine of transubstantiation, declared as binding doctrine in 1215, was without basis in Scripture.³ Still, Wycliffe's own doctrine of the Supper, set out in 1381, maintains a physical presence of Christ. Wycliffe thought of the church as comprised of those who lived under the rule of Christ, but ultimately God's predestination was the key, since true Christians were known by their godly fruits. Thus, the unholy were not genuine followers of Christ, and these included unholy clergy, not excluding the Pope. In an age of increasing uncertainties about authority, not helped by the papal schism, Wycliffe's insistence on Scripture as the supreme authority for Christians challenged established order. It brought strong opposition from the church, but Wycliffe died in 1384 before

the otherwise distracted Papacy could deal with him.

While Wycliffe rejected the papacy, monasticism, and prayers for the dead, he does not attain to justification by faith alone but continues with the characteristic medieval confusion of justification and sanctification. However, very importantly, Wycliffe is the first to take responsibility for the translation of the Bible into Middle English (1380), although, understandably enough, the work was done from the Vulgate and it does not appear that Wycliffe did any of the translation himself. The resultant translation had no doctrinal innovations but was somewhat slavishly literal. A revised version was produced a few years later and was widely appreciated. Copied by hand, often in an easily concealed small format, it was widely circulated, so that, despite Catholic efforts to root it out, 250 copies survive today. Wycliffe is a proto-Reformation figure of great importance, but he is not a 16th century Reformer.

Neither were the Lollards, who claimed to follow Wycliffe, Lutherans before Luther. The Lollards (named perhaps from the Middle Dutch word *lollaerd*, for someone muttering prayers⁴) met in groups to read the Bible, but they had no central structure or agreed creed.⁵ It is true that the *Twelve Conclusions* of 1395 (attributed to John Purvey, c.1354–c.1414, Tyndale's colleague) rejected transubstantiation, condemned various church abuses such as temporal power, clerical celibacy, certain ceremonies, exorcisms, confession of sin for absolution, pilgrimages and veneration of relics, breach of vows by nuns and resulting abortions. However, there is no specific assertion in the *Conclusions* of the supreme authority of Scripture or rejection of the papacy as such, although some held these positions. John Oldcastle's Revolt in 1414 achieved little and was soon put down, but it gave the impression that the Lollards were a seditious group. Lollardy went underground. Beliefs varied in different places and times. What was left merged into the Reformation in the 1530s or later. #

¹ S. J. Barnett, 'Where was Your Church Before Luther? Claims for the Antiquity of Protestantism Examined', *Church History* 68, no. 1 (March 1999), 14–41, is a useful survey covering the 16th to the 19th centuries.

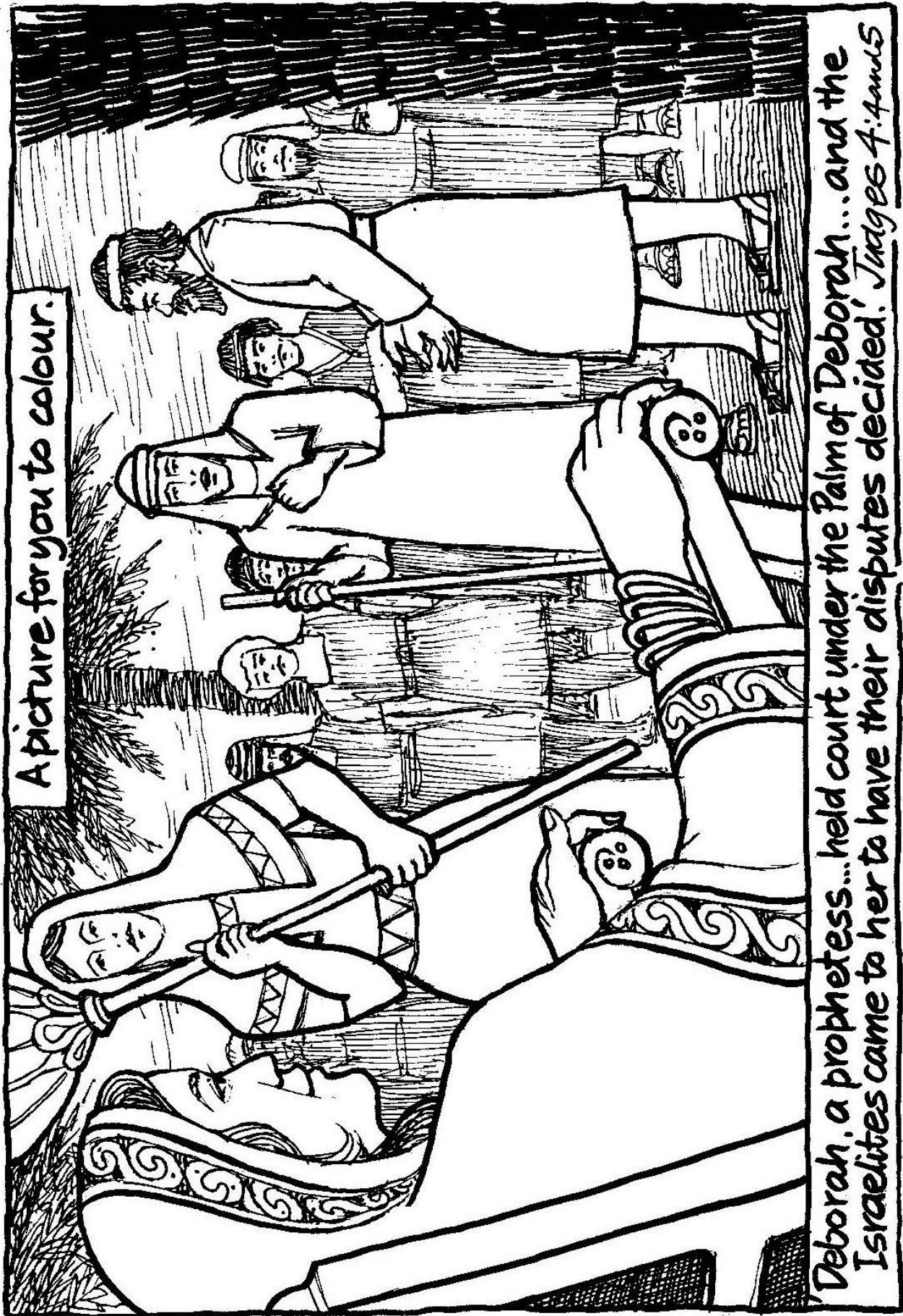
² The most up-to-date biography is G. R. Evans, *John Wyclif, Myth and Reality* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2005). It provides correction to the almost Protestant portrait of Wycliffe drawn in the 16th century and later.

³ Evans, *Wyclif*, 186, suggests 1379–1381 for Wycliffe's dissent from transubstantiation. The

earliest known use of the term 'transubstantiation' is about 1079 by Hildebert of Lavardin (1055–1133), later Archbishop of Tours, who reacted against the denial of what is represented by this term by his teacher, Berengar of Tours.

⁴ Evans, *Wyclif*, 255.

⁵ The literature on the Lollards is vast. Helpful is J. Patrick Hornbeck, *What Is a Lollard? Dissent and Belief in Late Medieval England* (New York: OUP, 2010).



A picture for you to colour.

Deborah, a prophetess... held court under the Palm of Deborah... and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided. Judges 4:4-5

KNOX NEWS

Knox has had some great studies and outings recently and it's good to see young people from All Nations coming along with leader Jona Gatluak Kot. **Please pray for Jona's 8 year-old called Pal who has been diagnosed with lymphatic cancer.**

Here is elder Chris White enjoying time with the children at Maroondah Reservoir on 28 September.



more fun at the Reservoir



and something more serious:



Getting ready for Operation Christmas Child



DAILY VERSE & PRAYER POINT

Rev Jim Klazinga of the PCEA Brisbane has initiated a text message service Monday to Saturday. Around 10am (11am in Brisbane) a message and prayer point are received by subscribers. If you would like to be added then contact Jim at 0466 213 763

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 sccarswell@optusnet.com.au 07 3397 1138

NEWS

HASTINGS PCEA

The induction of the Rev John Forbes to the pastoral charge of the Hastings is scheduled for Saturday 24 November at 11am at the Church, 41 Campbell St, Wauchope, 2446.

ULVERSTONE

Ulverstone are busy at craft. On 9 October, thirteen ladies made felt shapes to turn into mobiles for babies' rooms.



ALL NATIONS, MULGRAVE

The African community is often in the news in Melbourne for the wrong reasons, but there are many good things happening. Our congregation is unique in that it's the only African congregation with its own building, and it is a significant hub in the south-east of Melbourne for work among South Sudanese. However, for a regular congregation of 100 or so the hall is very small (70m2) and we are restricted in work we want to do with the community. In addition we want to supply office space for

African Advancement Victoria Inc. which was set up earlier this year to address issues in the community. Last July the church was encouraged to apply for an Infrastructure Grant through the Victorian Multicultural Commission, and on 23 November we learned officially that we had been successful. \$35,000 has been given to obtain the needed plans and permits and \$500,000 has been reserved in the 2019-20 allocation for the building extension works which we hope will suffice. We are extremely grateful for this as the congregation has no funds for such and in fact is still assisted in its ordinary support of its minister by the Knox Congregation.



L to R: Kenyatta Dei Wal (Federation of Southern Sudanese Associations in Victoria Inc.), Multicultural Affairs Minister the Hon. Robin Scott, Rev. Rowland Ward (new name: 'Shorty'), Rev. Tut Wan Yoa, (Minister of All Nations), Deng Monybuony Kor. All but Mr Scott are Board members of African Advancement Victoria Inc. which has received a grant of \$7,500 for a program under the direction of Rev. Tut Yoa.