


the presbyterian banner

June 2012

A photograph of two black and white birds, possibly terns, perched on a tree branch. The birds are facing each other, and the background is a dense canopy of green leaves. The text is overlaid on the bottom right of the image.

*The birds of the air nest by the waters;
they sing among the branches.
He waters the mountains from his upper chambers;
the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work.
Psalm 104:12-13*

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Editorial

Well, another Synod is over. We have now met as the Synod of Eastern Australia one hundred and sixty-five times. If that seems quite a lot of times it's no wonder, because we have them annually. Apparently only one year has been missed thus far! But that may beg the question: Why have one every year? Why not have it once every three years as other Reformed and Presbyterian denominations do? It would take the pressure off that time each May. Surely we could plan things out better that way? Perhaps we could. But one thing is for sure, it would not take the pressure off us denominationally. In fact, not being able to deal with issues as they come up, which we are able to do by having Synod every year, can cause a festering and unhelpful tension to build up. Several times that has happened over recent decades in one Australian denomination, and it has not greatly encouraged God's people to know that there is another wait of three years to consider appeals against the decisions that threw out the original appeals. In less than two decades, their Synod twice went substantially back on decisions that were made by the previous Synod three years earlier. This resulted in further unhappiness and division between churches and presbyteries.

Meeting every year, however, especially with the smaller number of delegates that we have, enables matters to be worked through more efficiently. That's not to say there have not serious divisions in the past; but having Synod more frequently generally works better. It also fosters fellowship. Eating meals together, chatting over a coffee, or going for a walk, helps us get to know each other all the more. In this way, we may take a lesson from the commercial world. They meet every year for their respective Annual General Meetings, as do our congregations. This issue is particularly taken up with our Synod. I hope that in this way you can sense some of what was going on. The Rev Jim Klazinga writes a detailed report of what transpired there, there are the photos, and also we publish the addresses and devotions given. Because of the length of the Moderator's Address, with his follow up devotions, there is a separate supplement which comes with this copy of *The Banner*. If you would like more copies of this supplement, please contact myself at the address details on this page.

*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts;
and though all its parts are many, they form one body.
So it is with Christ.*

*For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body –
whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free –
and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*

1st Corinthians 12:12-13

Synod Photo Credits: Anna Ward, David Kerridge, and the editor.

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The Church under the Banner

My Quarrel with Cardinal George Pell

George Ball

Perhaps some of you tuned in to the ABC to watch Q&A over the holidays (9/3/12), to view the debate between Richard Dawkins (atheism's most prolific televangelist) and Cardinal George Pell ('Australia's most senior churchman'). It had been advertised as a clash of the titans; two giants in their respective fields. We weren't really surprised by anything that Dawkins said; it was predictable. We were, however, a little surprised and disappointed by a number of statements made by the Cardinal. If we were expecting him to be the defender of orthodox Christianity, he most certainly was not. Though he made a number of valid points – points that we would agree with – yet he said a number of things with which we would quarrel. What he said gives us an insight into the theology of the modern Catholic Church. For some it was an eye opener – for others it was a reminder that there are still deep fundamental differences between the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church and historic Biblical Christianity or Protestantism. I want to examine some of these areas of disagreement. I want to do so not in any Pharisaic, self righteous, censorious or cantankerous way. I'm not trying to be mischievous or deliberately controversial, and don't consider myself any better than anyone else. I acknowledge that I am a sinner saved by grace. But we are to speak the truth in love. We are to desire the salvation of all. We are to love our neighbour. Just as Paul desired the salvation of his fellow Jews, so must we desire the salvation of our fellow human beings.

It is important, however, that we do understand that there are still significant differences between us – just as there were 500 years ago at the time of the Reformation. I think many have been lulled into thinking

that those differences are now a thing of the past; that we have moved on; things have changed; that now we are all part of the Christian Church. One reason for this confusion is because on a number of issues we are in remarkable agreement. We share common ground on many moral issues – for example abortion, gay marriage, poverty and social justice. (NB: Our reasoning may not always be identical, but we arrive at the same basic conclusions. The Cardinal affirmed traditional marriage. He said, 'We believe marriage is between a man and a woman; that it is for the continuity of the human race.' He did, however, surprise us by saying that a

around the globe – just as much as evangelical Christians, e.g. in Sudan and northern Nigeria, etc. The Muslim extremist doesn't distinguish between a Baptist, an Anglican, a Presbyterian or a Roman Catholic! When these atrocities occur, they are usually reported as persecution against Christians. Of course, we utterly abhor and condemn such actions. We sorrow for the victims and sympathise with them when these things happen. However, the reports saying that they are Christians doesn't necessarily mean they are!

Another reason for the confusion today is that we all call ourselves

Christian and can all recite the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. We use the same language: we say we believe in God, in Christ, in the Holy Spirit, in the Holy Trinity, in salvation, in forgiveness, etc. So what's the big difference?

I want to take issue with Cardinal Pell on three issues in particular which he alluded to in the programme (there were more - but three will do). I want to consider first,

the place of authority; second, the way to heaven; and lastly, the significance of the mass.

1 – The Cardinal was asked: 'What is the church's position on evolution?'

He answered: 'In the Catholic Church, you can believe whatever you like about evolution.' Cardinal Pell was asked by Tony Jones, 'Do you accept that humans evolved from apes?' He answered, 'Probably.' The Cardinal also said, 'We believe the first humans developed in South



A scene from the Q & A Debate (Photo: ABC TV)

homosexual relationship was 'well and good,' though he did state that homosexual marriage was wrong). We are thankful for the stand of the RC Church on these moral issues. Because of their numerical strength and media access, they are able to give these issues a higher public profile than if it depended on us. We commend the Catholic Bishops in Victoria who are taking an unpopular stand at the present time against gay marriage. We say, 'Good on them!' Another reason for the confusion is that RC's are experiencing persecution for their faith in many counties

Africa – I'm not quite sure how long ago - and all humans have developed from that...' and going further, 'Adam and Eve are terms meaning life and earth – like everyman, (its) a beautiful, sophisticated mythological account.'

Now you can see immediately that this is at odds with the teaching of the Bible in Genesis 1 and 2. It's at odds with the teaching of our Lord and the apostle Paul who both believed in a real historical Adam and Eve. Though the Cardinal did say later, 'I believe God created the world,' he obviously doesn't believe that God created Adam and Eve as two historical individual figures.

Even the atheist Dawkins could see that if you don't believe in Adam and Eve, then where did original sin come from? The Bible's teaching on creation is summarised in the Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 4 and in the Shorter Catechism Q.9 which states: 'The work of creation is God's making all things of

nothing, by the word of His power in the space of six days, and all very good.'

Should we be surprised that Cardinal Pell does not agree with us? No! Because this issue illustrates the major difference between us. It's not merely the difference between creation and evolution, though this difference also illustrates the fundamental difference between us. H. Carson writes; 'The basic issue in the debate between Rome and the Reformed Churches is the question of authority. For the Christian who is an heir to the Reformation principle ('sola scriptura', i.e. scripture alone), the final authority is clearly the written word of God. But equally clearly this is not so for the Roman Catholic.' (Carson, *Dawn or Twilight*. IVP. 39).

The Protestant tradition is strict – we believe only what is taught in the Bible or what is supported by the Bible. See, for example, WCF. 1: 9-10 and

Shorter Cat. Q. 2&3. 'The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him.' and, 'The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.'

The Roman Catholic position is much more flexible. The ultimate authority for the RC is the church. The church decides what the church is to believe. It was the Church that gave us the Bible, says Rome, and it is her task to interpret the scriptures for us. That is how and why so many



dogmas and practices have been introduced into the RC Church down the ages – for example praying to the saints, Mariolatry, etc. We believe that the Scriptures alone are clear and sufficient to show us what we should believe and how we should live – see, for example, 2 Tim 3: 16-17 and Psalm 19: 7-11. There is, then, still a big difference between the source of authority that the Protestant Churches accept and that which the RC Church accepts.

2 – 'Is it possible for an atheist to go to heaven?'

Cardinal Pell answered, 'Certainly! Certainly!' He went on to say, 'Well, I know from the Christian point of view that God loves everybody. Every genuine motion towards the truth is a motion towards God. When an atheist dies, like everybody else, they will be judged on the extent they have moved toward goodness, truth

and beauty... God loves everyone except those who turn their back on him through evil acts.'

Jones cheekily asked, 'So atheism is not an evil act?'

Pell said, 'Well, No – in most cases it is not.'

Shocked? Surprised? No! This is post Vatican II progressive theology which reasons like this: the Church is the sphere where men explicitly (and knowingly) acknowledge God. For others (outside the Church) if they show kindness, unselfishness or concern for others, though in fact they may reject him or even declare themselves to be

agnostics – they are in fact implicitly acknowledging God. RC theologian K. McNamara writes: 'It is possible for the atheist in good faith to be numbered among those who love God and despise self.' (Quoted in Carson. 23). So, at the end of the day everyone is in heaven! This also helps to explain the teaching of the RC Church regarding other religions. According to Catholic teaching the

God of Christianity is the same God as, say, the God of Islam, or the God of the Hindus, or the God of the Buddhists, etc. There is after all only one God. All these gods are an expression of the Christian God. Can this however be right? Is the God of the Bible the same as, let's say, Allah? If Allah is one; if Allah has no son; then surely Allah is not Jehovah – for Jehovah is not God in general but God the triune God in particular. We must insist that there is only one God, the living and true God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit – in whom alone is salvation. H. Carson comments: 'Here is the old heresy of universalism so beloved of liberal theology. When Hans Kung wrote: 'The resurrection of the crucified Christ which the Church believes and preaches is the proclamation of the resurrection of all men and the renewing of

the world', he parted company with the solemn biblical message of judgement and eternal separation of the impenitent from the presence of God'. (Carson. 23).

The Bible does not teach universalism! Not everyone is or will be saved. Remember Jesus' teaching in Matt. 7: 13-14, 'Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it.' Remember, too, his words in Matt. 10: 28: 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.' To state anything else is to contradict Jesus and the whole of Scripture.

Though the gospel is to be offered to all (and we should make every effort to declare the gospel to all), and though the death of Christ is a sufficient atonement for all, yet not all will be saved. Only those who put their trust alone in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved. This basic Bible truth is borne out (among many other places) in the best known verse in the Bible – John 3 verse 16.

NB: Who has God loved? God so loved the world. (His love is not confined to Israel).

NB: Who is Jesus? He is God's only begotten Son.

NB: What has God done? God gave His only begotten Son – ultimately to death on a Cross.

NB: What does God command us to do? 'Whosoever believes in Him.' The Cross brings us no benefit unless we believe in Jesus. We must repent of our sins and set our faith upon the Lord Jesus.

NB: What happens if we disobey? We perish.

NB: What happens if we obey? We shall have everlasting life.

Neither does the Bible teach that there are various ways to God and to heaven. It's nonsense to suggest that all roads lead to God. We don't follow that principle when we visit Sydney or Melbourne! We use our GPS! We use a map! There is one way to heaven; the Bible makes that very clear. Neither are there rewards for 'trying hard' or for motions towards goodness, truth or beauty!

Nicodemus knew that wasn't true. Saul of Tarsus knew it too. The Rich young ruler knew it to his own personal cost. Sincerity and seeking is not enough! We must find the Saviour. See Acts 4: 12 and 1 Tim. 2: 5 and Jn. 14: 6.

There is, then, (still) a vast difference between the way of salvation prescribed in the Bible and the way presented by the RC Church.

3 – Tony Jones asked Cardinal Pell: 'What is your concept of heaven'?

Cardinal Pell said, among other things, 'We believe in the resurrection of the body; in some sense we will be there as continuing persons with a new heaven and a new earth... how it will work out I have no idea.'...

Dawkins expressed surprise. 'I'm intrigued the Cardinal really believes we are going to be resurrected in the body! That's an astonishing idea. I don't believe you really mean that? Just as I think you really don't mean that the wafer turns into the body of Christ! You must mean body in some special sense!'

The Cardinal replied: 'Mr. Dawkins, I mean what I say!... I certainly believe that when the words of consecration are uttered that they become the body and blood of Christ... It's not against reason. I believe it because I believe the man who told us that, was also the Son of God.'

This highlights another significant difference between us. The difference is illustrated in the architecture of our buildings. Walk into a RC church – and the focus is on the altar. Walk into a Protestant church and the focus is (or should be!) on the pulpit with the communion table underneath it. While Catholics have always had preaching, they focus on the mass. While Protestants have always had sacraments – they focus on the reading and preaching of the Word. Catholics see grace coming through participation in the sacraments. Protestants see grace coming through the promise of the Word grasped by faith as it is read and preached.

Catholics see justification as a process whereby the righteousness of Christ is imparted to the believer through sacramental participation. Protestants see justification as an act whereby the righteousness of Christ

is imputed to the believer by grace through faith in Christ (Romans 5: 1).

Because of these (and other) major doctrinal differences, we have to conclude that Catholicism as explained and defended by Cardinal Pell is not Biblical Christianity. We have to conclude that the Roman Catholic Church is not a Christian church. By what standard? By the Word of God. Do I think there are Christians within the RC Church? Certainly! Think of Knox, Luther, Calvin; and some of you who were brought up in the RC Church. But did you continue in it after you discovered the gospel of grace? No! Please understand I am not saying that my church is perfect (far from it!) or that I am better than anyone else. I am not! What I am claiming, however, is that we have a complete and sufficient Bible; we have a complete and perfect Saviour; and we have a great salvation! That's all we need. Nothing less will do. Nothing more is necessary. I like the answer to the first question of the Heidelberg Catechism – which is a wonderful untainted summary and statement of the Christian's hope and faith.

Q1: What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A: That I am not my own, but belong body and soul, in life and in death to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven: in fact all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to Him, Christ by His Spirit assures me of eternal life and makes me whole heartedly willing and ready from now on to live for Him.

Sermon preached by The Rev. George Ball in Taree PCEA on 22/4/12

The Consequences of the Choices of Covenant People

1 Samuel 4:1b—22; 7:2—12

M. Gavin Smith

Comparisons help make things clear. So Daniel asked the Babylonian official to 'compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.' (Dan 1:13). When those who ate the royal food were compared with those who did not then there was no question but that Daniel and his colleagues were healthier. The comparison made that clear.

Comparisons help us get things in perspective. So Paul writes, 'I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.' (Rom 8:18). If our focus is only on the present, then our thinking gets out of perspective. However, when the present is compared to eternity, then we see the present in a new light. The comparison corrects our perspective.

Here in 1 Samuel a comparison is being made between two different responses to similar situations, and the different outcomes that resulted. But who were the people of whom we read in this chapter?

These were God's covenant people, and they were now living in the land that had been promised to them. The greatest privilege of these people was to be allowed, and enabled, to live in relationship—covenant relationship—with their God.

And that is also our greatest privilege. We were slaves to sin, and there we would have remained had not our loving God sent His Son to deliver us. God became man, the righteous one for those under condemnation, the sinless one for sinners. He died the death we deserved that we might enjoy resurrection life, abundant life, eternal life—and all in Him and through Him. So all that we have, all that we enjoy, results from our relationship with Him—that we are in Christ.

So what can we learn from these verses here in 1 Samuel about God's covenant people—then and now?

There are three points:

1. A needy people but also a covenant people

The Promised Land was surrounded by other nations—nations more often than not hostile to God and his people. That was the situation in these verses. The Philistines had deployed their forces; the Philistines came up to attack them. But it was not only that external threat that made God's people needy. They also struggled internally with sin, something they were very aware of as they brought their sacrifices to the Lord.

The tabernacle symbolised the presence of Almighty God among them—in their very midst. But when they came to the entrance, what they met with—what was placed between them and the significantly named 'Most Holy place'—was the altar of



Picture of bronze altar

sacrifice. That was the access God had made possible between a sinful people and a holy God. It was through a substitutionary death, the death of one of their most prized—because it was one their most perfect—animals. In their need they were dependent on God, and the way God graciously opened for them to draw near.

And beyond the external threats and the internal struggles was life lived in a fallen world. Like the rest of man-

kind, God's covenant people face circumstances that underline their neediness. They experience illness, infirmity, weakness, bereavement; they lack wisdom, resources, strength; they are a needy people. And what was true of that people living then is also true of us living today. We are also needy. We may not have the Philistines opposing and attacking us at every turn but we do face opposition, even persecution. We are just as needy as they were.

But—and it is a very big but, and a most wonderful but—in our neediness we are also God's covenant people. We rejoice to call God our God and to be known as His people. We are not left to live on our own, or to depend on our own de-

VICES. Indeed our situation is more wonderful than God's covenant people of that day because while they only had signs and pointers to the One who was to come; that Promised One has now arrived. And so we look not to the signs, but to the reality to which the signs pointed—we look to Jesus.

In our struggle against sin we do not rely on the sacrifices of bulls and goats, or on priests who were themselves sinful. No, in Jesus we have a great High Priest; and 'Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the

other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.' (Heb. 7:26–27). In our neediness, then, we can ask for a wisdom that is not our own (James 1:5); we can depend on the God who provides (Gen. 22:14); like the Psalmist we can testify, 'The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped.' (Ps 28:7).

We are a needy people, but we are

also a covenant people.

2. Priorities expressed in choices

How should needy people who are covenant people live? How does anyone live? They live as the people they are. Kiwis don't speak of 'fush and chups' just to provide amusement to their neighbours over the Tasman. That is what Kiwis do; that is how they live. And Aussies live as Aussies. That is what we do. And therefore when we ask how God's covenant people live then the answer is obvious—they live as God's covenant people. And that answer is underlined in Scripture. So Paul writes to God's covenant people in Ephesus, 'I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.' He reminds them that 'you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.' (Eph. 4:1; 5:8).

The problem is we don't, at least not consistently. And that brings us to our first comparison in these verses in 1 Samuel; for our priorities are often expressed in our choices.

The situations that triggered the different choices were very similar. In both cases Israel was under threat from the Philistines; indeed, in chapter 4 they had already experienced a defeat—about four thousand men were killed. And when the soldiers returned to camp, the elders asked the right question, 'Why did the Lord bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines?' But they already had their answer worked out, 'Let us bring the ark of the Lord's covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.' (1 Sam. 4:3).

The ark of the covenant was the gold-covered box which sat behind the curtain in the Most Holy Place. The ark pointed to the Lord's rule—it is called, 'the ark of the covenant of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim' (1 Sam. 4:4).

The ark pointed to the Lord's revelation—it contained copies of the Ten Commandments. The ark pointed to the Lord's reconciliation—the lid of the ark, the 'mercy seat,' was sprinkled each year with the blood of sacrifice. So the ark pointed to the Lord—the ruling, speaking, forgiving, covenant God.

But the thinking behind their choice to

bring the ark to the battlefield was also clear—if we bring the ark to battle, the Lord will be forced to deliver us to protect his honour. God will not allow anything to happen to the ark, he'll have to save us now—his honour's at stake. They had it all worked out. They knew what needed to be done, and they were doing it. But their choice did not express faith but superstition—what one writer calls 'rabbit-foot theology.' Israel was treating the ark of the covenant of the Lord Almighty like a lucky rabbit's foot!

Whenever God's covenant people—Israelites or Christians—live this way, we show that our concern is not to seek God but to control Him, not to submit to God but to use Him. We



Mother & daughter helpers at Synod

are showing by our choice that we prefer religious magic to spiritual holiness; we are interested in success, not repentance.

Their fool-proof scheme flopped. Verse 10 couldn't have expressed it more tersely—'So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent.' (1 Sam. 4:10). Not only that, but the ark of the covenant of the Lord was captured. It was a Titanic moment—the unthinkable had taken place! So what had happened? We are forced to two conclusions—first, the covenant Lord will suffer shame rather than allow His covenant people to carry on a false relationship with Him; and second, the covenant Lord will allow His covenant people to

be disappointed with Him if it will awaken them to the sort of God He really is.

And we dare not think that we are immune from this rabbit-foot faith. Whenever we confess with our choices (what we might never say with our lips)—that Man's chief end is to be benefited by God and to use Him forever—then you know the ark of God has been captured again.

Between chapters 4 and 7 we learn how almighty God makes it very clear to the Philistines who had captured the ark, and to the Israelites when it was returned, that He is quite capable of looking after His name and His reputation. It was a painful lesson for both Philistine and Israelite to learn. But learn it God's people did, and so in chapter 7 we read, 'all the people of Israel mourned and sought after the Lord.' Samuel's pastoral sensitivity is seen in addressing their longing and remorse in his preaching. Repentance frequently begins with such grief and a consciousness of misery. But true repentance consists of something more substantial. Genuine repentance, Samuel says, does not stop with tears and weeping but moves to concrete action—'rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths.' True repentance will meet the Lord's demand for exclusive allegiance—'commit yourselves to the Lord and serve Him only. Genuine repentance is the proper preparation for God's mercy—'He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.' (1 Sam. 7:3). Not that repentance coerces such mercy.

There is no merit in such repentance, but neither is there saving help without it. Repentance is not the cause but only the condition of the Lord's deliverance.

So there is hope in their response—the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the Lord only.' And on that basis Samuel told all Israel to assemble at Mizpah and 'I will intercede with the Lord for you.' 'On that day they fasted and there they confessed, 'We have sinned against the Lord.' (1 Sam. 7:5, 6). But the Philistines heard about the gathering and came up to attack

them. And so we are back where we started in chapter 4, with the Philistines gathered for battle. What choice would these needy people who were also God's covenant people make this time? They said to Samuel, 'Do not stop crying out to the Lord our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines.'

We are surely meant to notice the contrast between an Israel that thinks she has twisted God's arm by parading the ark, and one who in her helplessness can only resort to desperate prayer. Here in chapter 7 Israel is not dabbling in religious magic but walking by sheer faith. Their only weapon is prayer, their only hope that God will answer the cries of His people. There are no strategies; no programmes; no gimmicks. All they have is their covenant God and it is to this gracious God they cry. They haven't balanced their risks; all their eggs are in one basket—their hope in God.

This is not cop-out prayer but desperation prayer; it is the cry of a people who realise that their future—if they are going to have a future!—all depends on God. I wonder, have we, has our church, been brought to this point yet? Or do we think we still have a couple of tricks up our sleeves? Our choices will show our answer.

3. Choices have consequences

The contrast continues as we are shown that these two choices lead to two very different results—they are even marked with memorable names! As we have seen, the ark pointed to the Lord. Was it then not quite appropriate for God's covenant people to bring this symbolic box to their aid? No, emphatically no, because a trust in the ark is not at all the same thing as a trust in God! The Lord Jesus makes the same point—'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and per-

form many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (Matt. 7:21–23).

When we put our trust in anything other than God, then He will make the falseness of our trust clear. The Israelites had thought the presence of the ark meant God was bound to help them. How badly they got it wrong! And so the consequence of their choice should not surprise us—Israel was defeated; Hophni and Phinehas, the corrupt priests, were removed; and the ark was captured. When Eli the priest heard the news, it wasn't the defeat, or the death of his sons, but the news of the capture of the ark that caused him to fall from his chair to his death. His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, went



The covered ark with golden staves carried by the priests, and seven priests with rams' horns, at the siege of Jericho, in an eighteenth-century artist's depiction.

into early labour at the news and gave birth to a son. With her dying breath she named him Ichabod. She said, 'The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.' (1 Sam 4:22).

H. L. Ellison describes the story of Phinehas's wife as 'one of the most touching in the Bible, but' he adds, 'she was wrong. The glory of God had indeed departed, but not because the ark of God had been captured; the ark had been captured because the glory had already departed.'

When a people—whether nation or church—who know the inestimable privilege of being the covenant people of Almighty God choose to put their hope, their confidence, their

trust in anything—anything at all—other than God, then the game's up—Ichabod, the glory, has departed.

Compare that outcome with what happened when God's people chose to put their trust in him. That day, we are told, the Lord blasted the Philistines with His thunder and threw them into confusion, and so a situation which seemed hopeless was turned around by the God of hope.

It was a deliverance worth marking, so 'Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far has the Lord helped us.' (1 Sam 7:12). But it was surely more than the Lord's help that day which was commemorated. 'Thus far' speaks

of a whole chain of mercies remembered, and at the same time it looks to the future, with hope, for 'thus far' implies that what the Lord has been for His people He also will be.

But perhaps you ask how the events of 1 Samuel 4 fit into all this. It sounds nice to say 'Thus far has the Lord helped us,' but how was the Lord helping when the ark was captured, and Israel was defeated, and so many died? W. G. Blaikie suggests an answer—'All that,' he says, 'Samuel has con-

sidered well. Even amid the desolations of Shiloh the Lord was helping them. He was helping them to know themselves, helping them to know their sins, and helping them to know the bitter fruit and woeful punishment of sin...The links of the long chain denoted by Samuel's 'thus far' were not all of one kind. Some were in the form of mercies, many were in the form of chastenings.'

You see, trusting the Lord is not some magic button we press to make all our problems disappear. If we were to conclude from the comparison in these chapters that doing the right thing will always result in blessing and doing the wrong thing will always result in

harm, then we would be failing to take account of the wider teaching of scripture and of our daily experience. And if the consequences were so obvious then sinful men and women, who are nothing if not pragmatic, would soon be able to joint the dots and come to the obvious conclusion as to how they should live. No, the covenant relationship which we are privileged to enjoy is a covenant of grace. There is nothing earned or deserved or mechanical about it. For the God of grace has greater and deeper and wider concerns for His covenant people than we will ever realise. God, in His love and mercy and grace, is not simply opening the door to heaven, He is

preparing His people to live in covenant relationship with Him, and to do so for eternity. God wants His people to be holy as He is holy; He wants to make us like Jesus.

We all make choices every day, and these choices have consequences. We need to ask therefore, each time we choose, will this choice hallow God's name, will it advance God's kingdom, will it lead to the more perfect doing of God's will? Or in terms that really get to the heart of the matter, we need to ask, Who will get the credit from this choice? Who will get the praise? Who will get the glory? Man's primary purpose is not to glorify himself, but to glorify God; not to enjoy 'the good life', but to enjoy

God. And that is why the Lord, our covenant God, says to us—'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares the Lord.' (Jer. 9:23–24).

This was the opening address to Synod, given in the Rev M.G. Smith's capacity as the then Moderator. Rev. Smith serves as the minister of the Geelong PCEA congregation.

The World in the Banner

And He Was Not

By T. M. Moore

[*Christian Observer* Editor's Note: the Rev. T.M. Moore is the editor of the Worldview Church, serves as dean of the Centurions Program of the Wilberforce Forum, and serves as principal of The Fellowship of Ailbe, a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. He is the author or editor of twenty books, and has contributed chapters to four others. His essays, reviews, articles, papers, and poetry have appeared in dozens of national and international journals, and on a wide range of websites. Mr. Moore has additionally authored a daily devotional for the *Christian Observer* every day since the web-based version began publication on 31 October 2008.]

And then God took him.

The Lord accepts into His household those of good will and compassion; they are the company who always keep within themselves the likeness and image of God, and do not go against the Father's law. -- Anonymous, Fis Adomnan (Irish 9th century)

Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him. -- Genesis 5.24
'Mr. Moore, my name is Charles Colson, and I work for a ministry called Prison Fellowship.'

Thus began one of the most important relationships of my life. It ended all too soon, when, like Enoch, Chuck was suddenly summoned home.

I had just come home from work and was catching the news before dinner when the phone rang. Our daughter, Ashley, answered, and came into the den to say it was for me. 'Hello?' I ven-

tured, and then came Chuck's reply.

He introduced himself as though he had no reason to expect that I should know who he was. That same humility characterized Chuck though all the twenty-five years I knew him, during which we worked together on a wide range of projects.

Chuck was a man of eminent good will and compassion, as witness the way he devoted his life to the last, the lost, and the least among us. He loved prison inmates not just because he had been one of them, but because he saw something in them few bothered to observe: They are made in the image and likeness of God.

God's call to Chuck to work with prisoners is in many ways a parable of the Gospel itself, and of its promise to bring redemption and renewal to even the most lawless, downcast, and defeated person - or society.

Chuck understood that unless a society is grounded in the truth of the Gospel and divine Law – the works of the Law being written on the hearts of all men (Romans 2:14, 15) – there is no possibility of justice, no hope that compassion can prevail, and no abiding way to work for good will among men. From this conviction sprang his devotion to Christian worldview and to training leaders to build the Church in the years to come. I will miss Chuck. From that first call, when he asked me to come by his office for an interview, to the night, now almost three weeks ago, I wheeled him off the platform to the waiting EMTs, I counted him as a friend, and he treated me like one. While I'm sure my contribution was never as important or significant as he

always insisted it was, it was a great privilege and a source of deep satisfaction and joy to be in his company and be drawn along in the slipstream of the break-neck pace at which he sought the Kingdom and righteousness of God.

Chuck walked with God. And then God took him.

Thanks be to God.

+ *The Fellowship of Albee*

+ *Prison Fellowship, 44180 Riverside Parkway, Lansdowne, Virginia 20176*

Islam is State Religion of Ohio Prison System

A 21 April 2012 Godfather Politics article by Giacomo titled 'Islam is State Religion of Ohio Prison System' reports that after Muslims jailed in Ohio prisons started to demand they be fed meals that were 'halal' meals per Sharia law, Gary Mohr, Director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction ordered all prison kitchens to stop using pork and to make the meals Islam friendly. Mohr was attempting to prevent a lawsuit by the Muslim prisoners.

Non-Muslim inmate James Rivers subsequently filed a lawsuit against Mohr and the Ohio prison system for forcing all inmates to eat halal Muslim meals. United States District Court for the Northern District of Ohio Judge James S. Guin dismissed Rivers' case, writing: 'Plaintiff asserts that this...violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, subjects him to cruel and unusual punishment in violation of the Eight Amendment, denies him substantive and

procedural due process, and denies him Equal Protection.

'While the removal of pork from prison meals may benefit Muslim as well as Jewish inmates, it also creates a meal that can be eaten by all inmates regardless of faith.

'[Nor would] a reasonable person ... conclude that the menu change endorsed the Muslim faith. The choice is neutral to religion. Several faiths prohibit the consumption of pork...

'Plaintiff has not alleged any facts or cited any law which suggest he has a constitutionally protected interest in eating pork as part of his prison diet...

'Plaintiff's substantive due process claim is based on conduct alleged to be so severe that it shocks the conscience... To the contrary, Plaintiff objects to being treated the same as all other inmates. He does not allege he was denied pork while all other inmates were served this dish. Instead, he complains that all inmates are treated the same, regardless of whether they have a religious dietary restriction of this nature.'

Former Navy chaplain Dr. Gordon James Klingenschmitt, director of the *Pray in Jesus' Name* Project, commented on Judge Guin's dismissal ruling: 'In other words, because the prison enforces Muslim Sharia law equally upon all prisoners, none of them face discrimination – they are all treated as Muslims equally, and forced to eat Muslim food equally, so Christians have no dietary rights.'

Godfather Politics writer Giacomo concludes: 'Every day or two, I see another example of Islam and Sharia law creeping into the American judicial and governmental systems while Christianity is being pushed out and ruled against time and time again. Mark my words, if Barack Hussein Obama is elected to a second term, the thirteen stars on the US flag will be replaced by a star and crescent.'

+ *Godfather Politics, 457 Nathan Dean Boulevard, Dallas, Georgia 30132*

Bible Conference Recordings

The 2012 Fraser Valley Bible Conference was held 27-28 April 2012 at the Emmanuel Free Reformed Church in Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada, where conference speaker the Rev Dr. Joel Beeke, president of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, spoke on three topics under the theme 'Living the Christian Life.'

Recordings of the conference are available for free download:

-- Cultivating Sanctification: How Can I Be More Holy? — Part 1 [Dr. Joel Beeke]

-- Developing Spiritual Maturity: How Can I Grow in Christ? — Part 2 [Dr. Joel Beeke]

-- Overcoming Enemies of Holiness: How Can I Conquer Sin? — Part 3 with Q&A [Dr. Joel Beeke]

The 2012 Fraser Valley Bible Conference was a joint effort between several churches in the greater Fraser Valley, British Columbia, Canada, representing the Free Reformed Churches of North America, the United Reformed Churches in North America, and the Heritage Reformed Churches.
+ *Christian Observer*

Obama's Homosexual America

President Obama has made it official: He now supports same-sex marriage. It is his latest onslaught on traditional America. Mr Obama has made history. He is our first commander in chief to openly embrace legalizing homosexual and lesbian unions. He has crossed a cultural watershed, paving the way for the eventual triumph of the homosexual agenda. Rather than being a victory for 'civil rights' or 'marital equality,' Mr Obama's decision puts America on the path to moral disintegration. We are one step closer to becoming like secular, post-Christian Europe.

For years, Mr Obama claimed his position was 'evolving.' Facing re-election and under growing pressure from liberal interest groups, especially the powerful homosexual lobby, he finally capitulated. His decision was not based on principle, but cynical politics. Mr Obama needs the gay and lesbian vote to win in November. Immediately upon his announcement Wednesday, Hollywood donors opened their checkbooks. Millions were pumped into the Obama campaign coffers; the liberal base has been energized, and the cultural left is hailing Mr Obama as the Martin Luther King of our time. The president believes it is an electoral masterstroke.

Instead, he has made a big mistake. Same-sex marriage is opposed by most Americans. On Tuesday, North Carolina became the 31st state to vote for a constitutional amendment defining marriage as between one man and one woman. The referendum was not even close: More than 60 percent of voters supported Amendment One. The liberal media, such as the *New York Times*, consistently portray anti-gay-marriage advocates as bigots.

This is nonsense. Most Americans are neither intolerant nor bigoted. Rather, they understand that marriage is the basic institution of society. For thousands of years in the West, it has had a privileged role. Marriage solidifies the

bonds between a man and a woman, laying the foundation for raising children in stable families. It is the glue that binds a functioning, viable social order. Marriage is the natural unit that enables society to perpetuate itself from one generation to the next. This is not hate; it's common sense...

Every major religious faith – Christianity, Islam, Orthodox Judaism – teaches that homosexuality is an abomination. Homosexual behavior, especially sodomy, is unnatural and immoral. It is absurd, bordering on social madness, to elevate gay and lesbian relationships to the sanctified status of marriage – a form of moral anarchy characterized by radical individualism, hedonism and sexual liberation. Same-sex marriage is a symptom of cultural decay.

Our Judeo-Christian ancestors understood something that postmodern liberals do not: The primary purpose of sexual activity is to procreate – to have children – within the boundaries of marriage. Romantic love, personal fulfillment, burning passion – all of these things are nice, but secondary to the real purpose and mission of marriage. Secular liberals are engaged in social engineering. They are fostering the myth that women and men are the same and interchangeable.

For decades, liberals – aided and abetted by the popular culture – have been bringing homosexuality into the mainstream. It is slowly being promoted in public schools and constantly being glamorized in television shows and movies. The more the homosexual agenda is spread, the more militant its advocates become. They no longer want toleration. They seek full social acceptance. Once marriage falls, only one institution will be left standing in their way: traditional Christianity. The ultimate aim of the radical left has been to destroy religion – especially Western Christendom. Once a religion dies, so does the culture and civilization it spawned. America is at a crossroads, enmeshed in a cultural war with homosexual advocates like Mr Obama who are determined to strike at the very nexus of our civilization.

+ *Jeffrey T. Kuhner in The Washington Times, May 10, 2012*

Prescribed Search / Youth Work

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

JUNE 2012

SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE (Intermediate omit questions 4 and 5)

HEBREWS chapter 1

1. By whom has God spoken in these last days?
2. The apostle quotes several texts to prove that Christ is the Son of God. Write out the verses in Psalm 2 and 2 Sam 7 that he uses.
3. In Heb. 1:8—12 what other two psalms are also quoted?
4. In Psalm 110 what statement of the Father proves that Christ is greater than the angels? What are the angels sent forth to do? (2 verses)

chapter 2

5. What argument does the apostle make from the fact that those who disobeyed angels were punished? (2 verses)
6. Why was Jesus made a little lower than the angels?
7. What verse in Psalm 22 proves that Christ was not ashamed to call us his brethren [brothers]?
8. Why is Christ able to succour [aid] them that are tempted?

JUNIOR

LUKE chapter 7

1. What did the centurion's servants find when they returned to the house?
2. What did the people say when Jesus had raised the young man from the dead?
3. What things were John's disciples to tell him they had seen and heard?
4. Who loved much, and who love little

Please send the answers to:
Mrs I Steel
PO Box 942
Epping NSW 1710
Or email to: iesteel@gmail.com

Synod in the Banner

Synod 2012 Report

They came from destinations as far north as Brisbane and as far south as Tasmania. They arrived by plane, train, automobile, and motorcycle. They gathered together in the Wauchope church building of the Hastings congregation. They were the members of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia Synod of 2012. 25 elders and ministers were eligible to come; 21 were able to make it. They were joined by a number of men whom Synod decided to associate with the court (which means they could speak freely, but not vote): Rev Peter Smith, formerly pastor of the now defunct PCEA church in Armidale; Rev Alan Tripovich, retired pastor of the Hastings congregation; Rev Andre Scheepers, an RCNZ pastor serving as supply in the Ulverstone congregation; Rev Jan Bronsema, visiting delegate from the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands; and Rev Andrew Stewart, visiting delegate from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia. They were also regularly joined by a number of visitors.

On Tuesday and Wednesday nights, many of the delegates and visitors stayed with members of the local congregation, while a number stayed at a motel located within easy walking distance of the church building.

The people of the Hastings congregation proved to be wonderful hosts, taking care of all the necessary details, providing good facilities, and supplying ample and delicious food and drink for meals and snacks. In fact, the hosting was so good that synod decided to take advantage of their hospitality again next year. The fellowship among those attending was a real blessing, and a good spirit prevailed during the meetings themselves. The psalm singing and the prayers offered were uplifting and God-glorifying.

Those organizing the agenda figured synod would only need to last two days, one day less than normal. They were correct. And so, the meetings began at 4 in the afternoon

on Tuesday, 8th May, and concluded on schedule at about noon hour on Thursday, 10th May.

Tuesday Afternoon

The meeting was opened with an inspirational sermon from the retiring moderator, Rev Gavin Smith of the Geelong congregation (you will find his sermon printed elsewhere in this magazine).

Members and guests were then welcomed to the meeting, including a couple of new members of synod who had not previously attended. With the retiring moderator still chairing the meeting, the clerk of synod, Rev Trevor Leggott, presented the Administration Committee's report. Part of the Administration Committee's mandate is proposing commit-



Moderator in action while Glen Hamilton is presenting the Youth & Fellowship Report

tee assignments for the coming year. The suggested assignments were approved on Tuesday afternoon, though some minor changes were made later on Thursday morning. Here is a list of the various denominational committees, along with the current members:

Administration, Inter-Church Relations, Law and Advisory: T. Leggott (Convener Administration), S. Bajema (the current moderator), A. Miranda (the moderator-elect for 2013), R.S. Ward (Convener Law & Advisory), G.D. Ball (Convener Inter-Church Relations).

Jim Klazinga

Church and Nation, Media: D.K. Muldoon (Convener Church and Nation), S. Bajema (Convener and Media and Banner), M.G. Smith (Website), R.S. Ward (Archives), D. Kerridge
 Youth and Fellowship: A.A. Miranda (Convener), G. Hamilton, J. Klazinga, S. Carswell, T. Reeve.
 Finance: A.H. Steel (Convener), D.J. Ramsay, T. Buck, D.E. Kerr, J. Audet.
 Superannuation: R.S. Ward (Convener), D.J. Ramsay, S. Bajema, J. Audet.
 Missions: J. Klazinga (Convener), D.P. Smith, T.I. Leggott, D.K. Muldoon, I. Conley, J. Greensill.
 Training of Ministry: M.G. Smith (Convener), J.A. McCallum, A.A. Miranda, T.W. Yoa, D. Manly.

Also brought forward by the Administration Committee was a proposal to combine the Northern and the Central Presbyteries, based on the fact that the Northern Presbytery now consists of only three sessions, one of which is currently vacant, with the other two being moderated by ministers who have only recently joined the church courts. This proposal was probably the most contentious part of the agenda. After a fair amount of discussion, it was defeated by a substantial majority.

Tuesday Evening

Synod 2011 had decided to appoint Rev Sjirk Bajema as moderator-elect. Synod 2012 confirmed the appointment. And so on Tuesday evening, Sjirk took over the chair and capably led the rest of the meeting.

He began by addressing the Synod, reading from Acts 20:17-38 and offering an edifying talk on various aspects of the Reformation under John Calvin in 16th Century Geneva (this address be found in the supplement to this magazine). Following up on Wednesday and Thursday mornings, Rev Bajema began the days by taking the points

he focussed on in his Tuesday evening address and applying them to the contemporary situation of the PCEA in the 21st century. All three addresses were quite stimulating and much appreciated by those who heard them.

Also on Tuesday evening, representatives from the three presbyteries presented their respective reports. These reports consisted of updates on each of the congregations within the various presbyteries. If you'd like to know more about what has been happening in the recent past in the individual congregations in our denomination, you can find these reports in the printed compilation of Standing Committee Reports distributed to each of the churches before the meeting.

Wednesday Morning

We note with sadness that during the year since the previous meeting of synod, the Armidale Congregation of the PCEA disbanded. While most of the members there still meet together and hope to continue on as some sort of church body, they will no longer do so as a PCEA congregation. It has been a hard road getting to this point, but we know that the Lord in His providence will use all of this to advance His purposes, and we trust He will lead the few remaining folks from the congregation in the direction He would have them go. The Northern Presbytery requested that Synod grant them permission to sell the Armidale church building at fair market value. This permission was granted. Synod also made a decision regarding what to do with the funds, should the building be sold. Mind you, it is not certain that a suitable buyer offering a suitable price will soon be found, so it could very well be that the building will not be sold in the immediate future. Wednesday morning also saw the report of the Law and Advisory Committee discussed. A number of significant matters were dealt with without a whole lot of debate. One such matter concerned the status of resigned and retired ministers. There were guidelines enacted in 1986, but it was thought that these were unclear and confusing. The Committee suggested an extensive number of stipulations approved by

synod that should clarify the issue. The clerk of synod will be keeping a Register of Ministers without Charge and a Roll of Resigned or Retired Ministers. Ministers who wish to retain their PCEA ministerial status, but who are no longer serving a congregation in inducted, full-time ministry, will have their names on one of these lists. Ministers on the Register are eligible to receive a call; ministers on the Roll are not.

Synod also approved some provisions concerning ministers from overseas churches who come to Australia and wish to be eligible for appointment or call in the PCEA.

In addition, on the recommendation of the Law and Advisory Committee, synod decided to 'direct Presbyteries to see to it that congregations under their care take steps to include a fair value of their assets in their annual financial statement as well as detail of any liabilities.'

Wednesday morning also saw the Training of Ministry Committee's report discussed. The first decision made on this matter had synod declaring that it 'gives thanks to God for answering prayer in regard to the provision of students/applicants for the ministry. Synod exhorts the church to continue to ask the Lord of the harvest and Head of the church to send out more workers both for our situation and for the wider work of God's kingdom.'

Regarding Rev David Kumnick, the committee reported: 'The application to be accepted as a minister of the PCEA from Mr Kumnick was forwarded to the Committee from Southern Presbytery in July 2011. Southern Presbytery had resolved, 'Presbytery receive with pleasure Mr Kumnick's application for status as a minister of the PCEA noting his wish to identify fully with the PCEA as both a duty and privilege since our position reflects his stand...' The Committee warmly welcomes his application and declares itself satisfied. In particular we note his previous ministry; his rejection of the Declaratory Statement of the Presbyterian Church of Australia; his induction as an elder in the PCEA with the commitments that entails; and his desire to fully identify with the PCEA. The Committee therefore recommend that Mr Kumnick be declared a minister of

the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia.'

Synod's response: 'Synod welcomes the application from Revd David Kumnick and declares him a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia upon his signing the Formula of Subscription in the presence of Southern Presbytery.'



Fellowship around the dinner table

Regarding, Mr Denver Boehret, the committee reported: 'Mr Boehret was recognised as a Student for the ministry by Synod 2011. He is presently continuing his studies at the Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne. The Committee has received very satisfactory reports from Mr Boehret following each semester's studies. In addition, the Committee set an essay subject — 'The Priority of Preaching in the Role of a Minister' — which was completed during the summer break. The Committee commends Mr Boehret and his family to the prayers of Synod and of the church during this period of preparation for ministry, which makes many demands on him and his family.'

Synod's response: 'Synod is encouraged by the positive report of Mr Denver Boehret's progress. Synod commends him, and his family, to the prayers of the church during this demanding period of preparation for ministry.'

Regarding Mr Robin Tso (who is currently employed by the Hunter/Barrington congregation as an unordained assistant pastor), the committee reported: 'The Committee was forwarded an application from Mr Tso for recognition as a candidate for the ministry by Central Presbytery in December 2011. The Committee requested from Mr

Tso a transcript of his studies, and copies of some essays and of a dissertation written as part of his course. After some delays this material has now been received. The Committee recognise that Mr Tso has completed a four year Theological course at the Free Church of Scotland College Edinburgh, under the University of Glasgow; and that he is already an elder in the PCEA; and as noted by Central Presbytery (in November 2011), 'that he has not yet been a member of the



Synodical Treasurer—Alex Steel

PCEA for two years'. The Committee declares itself satisfied with his course of studies and recommends that Synod accepts Mr Tso as a candidate for the ministry, with this proviso, that before he is taken on Trials for License, he present to the Presbytery a Certificate from the Training of Ministry Committee that he has satisfactorily completed an essay [5000 words] in Australian Church History set by the Committee, and any other work the Committee may deem necessary.'

Synod approved the committee's recommendation. And since Robin and his wife Vanessa were present at the meeting, the Moderator had an op-



Lunch time

portunity to publicly address Robin and encourage him in his desire to work toward becoming an ordained minister.

The Church and Nation Committee's report was also discussed during the Wednesday morning session. This report consisted of some brief scriptural expositions on a number of important ethical issues. These helpful expositions will be published in this magazine.

Wednesday Afternoon

Rev Bajema had to briefly vacate the chair Wednesday afternoon in order to present the report on *The Presbyterian Banner*. Noted was the effort made by all involved in putting together and distributing this magazine, particularly Rev Bajema as the editor. To all involved in this work, thanks must be given.

Rev M.G. Smith reported on the denomination's website, of which he is the webmaster. If you have thoughts on how to improve our use of this resource, contact him.

The Missions Committee Report was brought up next. Their report contained a good amount of information concerning a number of the mission fields we support (See the Standing Committee Reports distributed before the meeting). This makes for highly recommended reading for anyone interested in the work of missions, which should be every person in all our congregations.

Concerning one particular mission work, synod committed itself 'to encourage those within our denomination to consider opportunities for volunteer work in Peru (Annie Soper School and Colegio San Andres).'

Also noted and lamented was the rather dismal state of contributions for missions by our churches. Each of us should consider how we and our congregations can improve on this.

Rev George Ball was called on to present the Inter-Church Relations Committee Report. In response, synod passed three deliverances:

1. 'The Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia meeting in Wauchope 2012

expresses its sorrow at the divisions between the Reformed and Presbyterian churches in Australia and resolves as the Lord enables us to do all that we practically can to maintain and promote brotherly relations.'



The ex-RCNZ contingent

2. 'The Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia gives thanks to God for the churches with whom we have formal fraternal relations and for those churches with whom we have contact and resolves to pray for the Lord's blessing upon their work and witness.'

3. 'We recommend that the PCEA should be represented at the ICRC in Wales in 2013. The Committee be free to make arrangements; any cost falling to Synod not to exceed \$2,000.'

Regarding sending delegates to the 2013 ICRC meeting, synod decided to add \$165 per congregation to the cost of this synod, so that \$1980 could be raised toward the cost of sending representatives.

Mr Glen Hamilton, retiring convenor of the Youth and Fellowship Committee, was invited to present their report. Attention was drawn to significant information concerning suggested Sunday School work, and reports of camps held in the past year. In response, synod made the following decisions:

1. 'Synod thank all Sunday School teachers and youth leaders for their dedicated work in teaching the young people.'

2. 'Synod thank Mrs Margaret Kinder for sending birthday greetings to children.'

3. 'Synod thank Mrs Irene Steel for setting and assessing Search Work questions and awarding prizes to the children.'

4. 'Synod recommend that Presbyteries/local congregations examine the need for Youth activities/camps and seek to provide opportunities for fellowship.'

Synod also thanked Glen for his extensive contributions as convenor. Thankfully, even though he is stepping down from this role, he will continue to serve as a member of the committee.

One of the highlights from every synod meeting is the opportunity to interact with representatives from other denominations. This year, as mentioned above, we had two such men with us. On Wednesday afternoon, we were able to hear them address us and ask them questions. The last item of business dealt with on Wednesday afternoon was the report from the Superannuation Committee. One decision made in this area was to state the following: 'Synod request Sessions and Deacons' Courts to keep a close eye on ministers' leave entitlements to ensure ministers do not suffer burn out through failure to take it, and that Presbyteries keep this in mind in the annual examination of records to ensure outstanding entitlement is minuted at least once a year.'

Wednesday Evening

Another highlight of synod meetings are the Missions Evenings. This year, we were blessed to welcome Glenda de Jager and Lorraine Francis from Mukti Mission in India. Glenda does work for Mukti here in Australia, while Lorraine serves directly on the field in India. The word Mukti refers to salvation and deliverance from the powers of darkness. Mukti Mission began 123 years ago. It has spread out through six Indian states, and has helped thousands of women and children, providing homes for the destitute regardless of their background, from infants to the elderly, and offering education for many for whom it would not otherwise be available. Lorraine was able to share how the Lord had worked in her own life, drawing her as a young woman out of the false Hindu religion and into a living relationship with Him. She was also able to share some heartbreaking and encouraging stories about a number of the women and children



Lorraine Francis from Mukti

Mukti has been able to help. The stories were heartbreaking in terms of describing the tragic situations these people came out of, but encouraging in terms of how the Lord has blessed them through Mukti. After the Mukti presentation, Trevor Leggott offered a report on his ongoing work with AIM. He spoke about a number of couples and families who have begun serving with AIM in various fields, as well as other encouraging developments.

[Personal notes from author – I'm hoping to establish contact with an AIM congregation in our local area and perhaps have our congregations develop some sort of relationship. You might want to find out if you can do the same in your area. Also, our family would like to go on a three week AIM mission tour, possibly sometime next year if spots are available. If you're interested in joining us, let us know.]

Thursday Morning

The final session of synod focussed on financial matters and other assorted business that had to be wrapped up. The General Treasurer, Mr Alex Steel, offered his report and the report of the Finance Committee. Included among the responses was synod making the following statement: 'We record our thanks to God for the continual temporal blessings the church as a whole has enjoyed since Synod 2011.'

Also presented were reports from the Trustees for the NSW Trust Corporation, the Queensland Trust Corporation and the Trustees for Victoria. The status of Dr Wes Hanna's posi-

tion on Northern Presbytery was discussed. He is currently serving as interim moderator of the Northern Rivers congregation during their vacancy. It was resolved to grant him a seat on Northern Presbytery while he is serving in this capacity.

Near the end of each synod meeting, a moderator-elect is chosen. Under normal circumstances, this person will be elected as moderator at the following synod. A method is followed to have the ministers take turns serving in this capacity. It was decided that this year's moderator-elect would be Rev Andres Miranda.

Also discussed was the ongoing role of the currently serving moderator during the time between meetings. It was noted that in the past, moderators of synod were encouraged to visit with the various congregations at some point during the year. It was also noted that congregations are free to invite him to come visit if they believe this would be desirable.

The final matter addressed was the expression of thanks. Thanks were offered to the members of synod, the clerk, the Treasurer, the Moderator, and to the members of the Hastings congregation for their hosting and their wonderful hospitality.

Rev Peter Smith also took the opportunity to express his thankfulness for the support and prayers of the congregations for him and his family during the time of his recent operation and recuperation. And of course, thanks must be given to God, who allowed us to have a fruitful meeting, and who will continue to keep His Church in all matters great and small.



Our Clerk busy at work

Synod in the Banner

Wauchope May 8—10, 2012



Synod just before the start of a Session



Members of Synod 2012 (from top); Back Row steps: Elders A. Steel, D.P.T. Manley, R. Campbell; 2nd back row steps: Elders R. Tso, N. Robinson, Rev. J.D. Klazinga; 3rd back row steps: Elder D. Hamilton, Rev. T. Leggott, J.A. McCallum; On flat surface: Rev's G.D. Ball, S. Bajema, D.J. Kerridge, M.G. Smith; J.A. Scheepers; Elders D. Boehret, J. Bronsema (GKN(Lib)); Revs. R.S. Ward, A.A. Miranda; Elders J. Kerridge, S. Carswell; Revs. T.W. Yoa, P. Smith; Elder G.A. Neil (obscured); Rev. A. Stewart (RPCA); Rev. D.K. Muldoon; Elder I. Hamilton; Rev. A. Tripovich.



Yummm-m-e!



Our helpers need to eat too!