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***Devotion*: "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy." Micah 7:18.**

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FEATURES

ARTICLES

DON'T FORGET

The Formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, June 11, 1936.

THE BIG LOSER - 2

A Study on Revelation 12: 7-17

We continue our study on this important passage. We considered the legal war in Heaven with Satan being defeated and cast out. He was a sure loser. In our study now we take up the thought that he's a Sore Loser.

A SORE LOSER.

A voice calls out: *"But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows his time is short."* And part of this fury is the Devil's War on the Church. He's failed to destroy the Messiah and been hurled out of Heaven. Now he turns on the Church.

Direct Persecution

And the first thing he does is *to attempt to destroy the Church by Direct Persecution. "He pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child."* [verse 13] That's what happened to the NT Church – and to the Early Christians. The Devil tried to stamp out the Church – first by opposition from the Jews, and then by the persecution of the Empire. But he was unable to do so then – nor since - simply because God protects His Church during the Gospel Age. *"She was given the two wings of a great eagle so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time out of the serpent's reach."* He bears her on Eagles' Wings.

The language here reminds us of how the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt: *"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagle's wings, and brought you to myself."* [Exodus 19:4] God enables the Church to escape into the desert too! We associate the desert with hardship and privation. But in the Bible, it's often the place of blessing. God says about Israel: *"Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt."*[Hosea 2:14-16] Here in a symbolic way the Lord brings His Church into that secure and protected place. Physically, of course, the Church is in the World. But it's not "of the world" – not part of the great City. Its protected and kept by the Lord in the midst of the World. Individual Christians may have to pay the ultimate price for their allegiance to the Lord – but the gates of Hell will not prevail against His Church. She'll continue to work and witness – until the 1260 days – or it's equivalent – *"time, times, and half a time"* – is completed.

A Flood Of Evil.

But when the Devil sees his strategy of Direct Persecution failing, he adopts indirect ones. *He tries to sweep it away by a "flood of water" proceeding out of his mouth* [Verse 15]. We're not told what this is. But the description gives us some idea. He tries to make the Church "*river borne*" – to rip it from its foundations, so that it will become like flotsam, carried along by the current and dashed to pieces. And it doesn't take much imagination to see what this alludes to. Already in the Letters to the Seven Churches Jesus has spoken about false doctrines and philosophies coming into the Churches. Both Paul and John warn against false teachers and false teaching. In fact

Paul uses a similar illustration when he warns about false doctrine. He tells us to *"no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming."* [Ephesians 4:14] If Satan can't get at the Church by persecution, he tries to shake it loose from it's foundations by floods of false teaching. This "flood" may be open immorality under a veneer of Christian Teaching. But more often than not it's false teaching dressed up in the clothing of "tolerance", "freedom", "open mindedness", "science" or "reason". It can even dress itself up under the guise of "piety" – teaching the principles of men as the principles of God. And this flood of evil has sometimes almost swept the Visible Church away from its foundation in Christ and in His Word.

Will it succeed? No – no more than the frontal attack! That flood will be swallowed up by the earth! In the OT we read how the earth opened to swallow worldly people who sought to destroy God's People. In the Song of Moses, Exodus 15:12, after deliverance from Egypt, Moses sings: *"You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them."* A similar thing happened in the case of Dathan and his company. Psalm 106 tells us:*"In the camp they grew envious of Moses and of Aaron, who was consecrated to the Lord. The earth opened up and swallowed Dathan; it buried the company of Abiram."* [16-18.] Put bluntly, they all died – some very suddenly and dramatically! And that's often the way the Lord uses to protect his people from false philosophies and theologies – "*the earth swallows them up*." Their proponents die, and their ideas die with them! Tombstones are the only memorials to some great opponents of the Christian Faith – and tombstones will be the only memorial to those who try to uproot the Church from its foundations! As the Psalmist puts it in Psalm 37:35-38: *"I have seen a wicked and ruthless man flourishing like a green tree in its native soil, but he soon passed away and was no more; though I looked for him, he could not be found."* One generation will undo the work of the previous one! Not even Satan's vomit will prevent the Church from accomplishing its Mission on Earth. And surely this is a warning to us. Don't put too much emphasis on false philosophies and theologies! Don't be afraid of them and don't let them determine our agenda and our life! They'll come and go – and the earth will swallow them up – just as surely as it swallowed up the sons of Korah. It would be a great pity to spend all our time combating this and that evil and never get round to meditating on the rich things of the Word of God.

"Tombstones are the only memorials to some great opponents of the Christian Faith – and tombstones will be the only memorials to those who try to uproot the Church from its foundations."

A SHAMELESS LOSER.

And then Satan *is a Shameless Loser*. We see this in his *War on the Woman's Offspring*. For example, *this reveals his Vicious Nature*. When an honourable person is beaten fairly and squarely, they manfully take their punishment. Not so the Devil. When he's beaten in heaven – by One whom he has the audacity to claim to be equal to, or better than – he doesn't accept the defeat. He does something very despicable. He turns on Women and children. He turns on this beautiful Woman who has just had a baby. But it gets even worse. When he can't get at her he turns on her children. Here is the great Wife Beater and Child Molester *par excellence* – the Father of all child molesters and abusers of women today. It's ironic isn't it – this great spiritual being, who can sweep a third of the stars away – attacking defenceless women and children. How much more vicious, spiteful, sneaky and deceptive can you get! No wonder the Psalmist cries out: *"Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered*." Why? Because "*a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows is God in his holy dwelling."* He'll not only look after the Mother – he'll also avenge the children too – those "souls under the altar" who have paid the supreme sacrifice and who cry out to him for justice!

His Mighty Fall.

But not only does this show us his Vicious Nature. *It shows us how far the Mighty has fallen*! Here is the Great Pretender to the throne of the Universe - thrown out of Heaven, defeated in his attacks on the Church of God, and reduced to going after the "small fry" – careless individual Christians who let down their guard. No wonder the writers of the NT weren't afraid of the Devil – or prepared to give the world up to him! As far as they were concerned, he's a "has been". Peter tells us that the devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking those who he may devour. But he also says this: *"Whom resist steadfast in the faith."* And to the same effect are the words of Paul. Yes, we fight against principalities and powers. But, he says, if we're strong in the Lord, and take to ourselves the whole armour of God, we'll be able to stand – and quench all the fiery darts of the evil one! But it's James who shows us just how weak he is. He says that if we resist him, he'll flee from us! All the weakest and most nondescript Christian has to do is to resist him – and he'll run away! The most glorious creature in the Universe apart from God has been reduced to nothing because he's lifted up his hand against the Lord Almighty. And this will also be the end of all those who set themselves against the Lord and his Anointed. Though they've been made in the image of God, and made to be Kings on Earth, they too shall share the fate of the Devil and his angels.

Our Own Weakness

But all this *also says something about ourselves*. If we give our allegiance to this Accuser, this Shameless "father" of Woman Abusers and Child Molesters – what sort of people does that make us to be? And if we listen to him, and don't resist him – what sort of people does it show us to be? It shows how weak, and foolish we are - and how much we need a mighty and loving Saviour, who can lead us and instruct us and keep us. But it ought to fire us up too! Are we going to give our allegiance to this spiritual being? Are we going "give in" to him when all we have to do is resist – and he'll flee from us? Surely not! If anything ought to encourage us to get up and "have a go" it's the truth we have here – that the Devil is a shameless Loser. Let's go out today and make sure he continues to be a loser. He's been hurled out of heaven by the Cross of Jesus; thwarted in his assault on the Church; and he can't hurt us if we resist him.

BLOGGING ABOUT…

A Day at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, India - Dr Dennis Muldoon

The Presbyterian Theological Seminary (PTS) was established by American Presbyterians in 1969. It began in the city of Roorkee in North India and was later transferred to its current location at Dehra Dun, a thriving city in the foothills of the Himalayas. PTS has maintained a Reformed witness into the 21st century, despite the turmoil associated with ecclesiastical unions after independence in 1947.

The witness of PTS has led to some churches adopting Reformed doctrines and Presbyterian government, such as the Reformed Presbyterian Church of NE India in 1979. Other Presbyterian churches are rediscovering their roots through the ministry of graduates from PTS. Other churches, like the Free Churches of Central India (FCCI), have benefited from PTS trained ministers. Samit Mishra will graduate this year and minister in the FCCI.

Over 100 students are enrolled in various courses at PTS. Most do a pre-theology course to improve their English and understanding of the Bible. They go on to do a three year BTh degree. Others are doing a post graduate MDiv course. The principal, Dr Mohan Chacko, is a national, as are the majority of the faculty. Guest lecturers are an important component of the PTS program. I taught two courses in the eight weeks I was at PTS.

The PTS campus of about two hectares is well forested with some giant gums and beautiful lychee trees. It has a large auditorium built in the last ten years as well as academic building, men's and women's hostel, and staff housing. From the roof of the guest room where I stayed the Himalayas could be seen rising to almost 3000m. They were especially beautiful when it snowed.

Morning Chapel

Life at PTS is regulated by bells. The first is at 6am, when students rise and have their quiet time. If I wanted a hot bucket bath I had to get up earlier to switch on the water heater. The 7am bell saw students hurrying to the dining hall for breakfast. My neighbour kindly brought me a cup of *chai* and some *parathas* (fried flat bread) about this time. At 7.55am there was a warning bell for class at 8am, which started with another bell. The next class, at 9am, was announced by ringing the bell.

At 10am each day all students and faculty met for chapel. After some singing there would be an expository sermon by a member of faculty, testimonies by three students, or a ministry report by some students. The students loved singing and I would often hear them practicing late into the night. The student testimonies were most interesting and encouraging. It was here that I got to know about students who were not in my class. Some would share of their wonderful conversion from Hinduism. Others were from Christian families but also wonderfully converted. Many from NE India are second or third generation Christians. It was amazing to learn how each one was led to study at PTS.

Students came from all over India and from four neighbouring countries. They came from different language and cultural backgrounds. Sometimes they sang special songs in their own language, but all teaching and conversing at PTS was in English as this was the only common language.

During the summer break students went to minister in a church, often their home church. Some spoke of the difficulties they had as they went back to liberal churches. Others spoke of opposition they encountered from Hindus as they conducted mission meetings. One student was rejoicing that he had been counted worthy to suffer for Christ. It was during this time of sharing that I heard Prasoon say he was from Jabalpur and ministered in a place called Katni. He later told me he was a member of the FCCI in Jabalpur. He and Samit shared about the opposition they faced from militant Hindus in this city and state.

After morning chapel everyone enjoyed a cup of *chai* and a chat. A news report was given and announcements made for the whole community. Those having a birthday would give everyone a treat (a sweet or cake). After singing 'happy birthday' someone would pray for the birthday person. Sometimes the principal would introduce visitors to PTS. One day there were brothers from the Presbyterian Church in Brazil. They assured us that this church, with over 3000 pastors, was Orthodox Presbyterian and not 'Charismatic' Presbyterian (of which there are some Brazil). Another visitor was a PTS graduate who had planted a church near Rishikesh, a Hindu pilgrimage centre in North India.

More Classes

At 11am the bell went for classes to resume. After two more classes students headed to the dining hall for a large plate of rice and curry. The final two classes for the day were from 2-4pm. This was not an ideal time to be teaching the Book of Revelation. Thankfully the weather was not too hot so, despite a big meal of rice, the students usually stayed awake.

At 4pm the bell went and classes ended for the day. The students would hurry to do their duties, which included sweeping up leaves for the men, and cleaning the rooms

for the women. At 4.30 all gathered around the volley ball court to watch an inter-house match of volley ball. I was not obliged to do duties or to play volley ball, so I walked down to the shops to buy some supplies.

It was not hunger but another bell which signalled dinner at 6.45pm. A bell at 7.30 saw students slowly making their way to the library to study until 9pm. After this they were free. Some chose to practice their singing in the hall next to the guest room at this time.

I often went to a faculty home to enjoy an evening meal. My neighbour made tasty chicken curries. Another lecturer was from the Presbyterian Church of America so I enjoyed some American style food. Another was from the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated). John was from the PCA in Melbourne. Raja was a convert from Hinduism who in the providence of God had come to PTS to study. He embraced Reformed doctrine and Presbyterian government and joined the faculty of PTS. The principal also hosted me for dinner a number of times.

At 10pm the nightwatchman went on duty. His duty included ringing the bell on the hour every hour throughout the night. He walked around the campus blowing a whistle and tapping his stick to scare away any intruders- and to assure those trying to sleep that all was well.

NOAH'S ARK.

On Saturday, the 28th April Noah's Ark in Schagen, Netherlands, was opened to the public. One reporter says: "The massive central door in the side of Noah's Ark was thrown open on Saturday - you could say it was the first time in 4,000 years - drawing a crowd of curious pilgrims and townsfolk to behold the wonder." It's the work of Dutch creationist Johan Huibers as a testament to his faith in the literal truth of the Bible.

At the other end of the spectrum of faith, "Environmental activists are building a replica of Noah's Ark on Mount Ararat in an appeal for action on global warming.. The ark will be revealed in a ceremony on May 31, a day after Greenpeace activists climb the mountain and call on world leaders to take action to tackle climate change."

I know which one I'd prefer to visit!

HEROD'S TOMB DISCOVERED

The Crosswalk Weekly Update [the weekly newsletter from the Christian Website, Crosswalk.com] for the 14th May carries the story of the Discovery of Herod's Tomb. According to a Jewish archaeologist, Dr. Tsvika Tsuk, who has been searching for the Tomb for over 30 years, this is a "once in a generation" discovery. The article goes on: "According to reports, its been found on the volcano-shaped mound of Herodium, rising 2,460 feet above sea level southeast of Bethlehem. Herod the Great, the Herod of the nativity story, built the entire mound, with his palace inside the summit, to mark the site of one of his most important battles. In 43 BC his mother, his sister, his fiancé the famous Mariamne, and other members of his family along with himself were forced to flee Jerusalem when the Parthians besieged the city. On his way to Masada, his mother's carriage overturned near here and he feared for her life. The Parthians caught up to him, but he overcame them in what became a crucial victory on his way to receiving the crown of Judea from Rome in 37 BCE."

The Jewish historian of the period, Josephus Flavius, described the "funeral entourage" in detail. He writes:"*The body was carried upon a golden bier, embroidered with very precious stones of great variety, and it was covered over with purple as well as the body itself; he had a diadem upon his head and above it a crown of gold. He also had a scepter in his right hand. About the bier were his sons and his numerous relations; next to these was the soldiery distinguished according to their several countries and denominations...these were followed by five hundred of his domestics, carrying spices. So they went eight furlongs to Herodium for there by his own command, he was to be buried*; (Antiquities of the Jews 17.8.3).But even though Josephus indicated where the tomb was - at Herodium - the actual discovery has been no easy task.

For Herod's Palace - or what remains of it - Bethlehem can be seen in the west. Years before Herod, the prophet Micah said that Israel's true King would be born there. [Micah 5:2] The Tomb of the King who sought to put the true King of Israel to death now lies within sight of the birthplace of Jesus who lives forever. The writers of this article draw the appropriate conclusion. "Herod believed in his own press. History and archaeological sites in Israel prove this beyond doubting. But Herod could not succeed against the plans of the Lord. Though he may have gone to his tomb believing that he'd done so, Christians will come with a different knowledge and faith: knowledge in the sovereignty of a living God and faith in a baby boy who grew to be the "King of the Jews." Ironically, there are two places in Israel that commemorate the "tomb of Jesus." And both of them are empty. Truly, no man — no matter how great he thinks he is — can thwart the plans of God."

- ***For the full article, see: Eva Marie Everson & Miriam Feinberg Vamosh [Crosswalk Weekly Update, 14/05/2007]http://www.crosswalk.com/news/religiontoday/11540110/***

BOOK REVIEWS ……..

Let's Study Revelation - Derek Thomas, Banner of Truth Trust, 2003, ($27.95).

Readable, and believable, commentaries on the Book of Revelation are not easy to find. This book of just 200 pages is a great help to those seeking to understand this otherwise difficult-to-understand book of the Bible. As we might expect from this 'Let's Study' series by Banner of Truth, and from this scholar, this book gives an evangelical and reformed analysis of the Book of Revelation. This does not mean that the book is without its weaknesses.

The introduction to this commentary is brief compared to most, but gives the basics for understanding the book, and Thomas's approach to the book of Revelation. He mentions the four classical methods of interpretation, albeit in a very brief format. Thomas states which view he adopts and also his view on the millennium. He emphasises the need to understand the structure of Revelation and proposes an outline of seven divisions- which he confuses by calling visions. If visions start with 'I saw' then there are many more than seven. What determines a separate vision is unclear.

The divisions of the book are broadly in line with those proposed by other reformed scholars, although Thomas is not always consistent. In the introduction chapters 12-14 are called a division, but in the body of the book this division extends to 15:4. Again he includes chapter 20 in the final section but then in the body of the book this seems to be included in the division 17-20, and rightly so (p160).

These divisions Thomas stresses are not chronological but rather parallel or recapitulating. Moreover, the numbers are to be understood symbolically not literally. Failure to appreciate these aspects of Revelation leads to confusion. Thomas seeks to correct some of the popular interpretations, namely 'preterist' and 'futurist' (incl. 'dispensationalist'). We are living now in the millennium or last days, the time from the first to the second coming of Christ (although in one place Thomas points to a time from AD70 to the Christ's return- p93). The victory in the war between Christ and Satan referred to in Revelation was won by Christ in the Cross.

The OT background to Revelation is continually emphasised by Thomas. This is how the first readers would have interpreted this book and we must do the same. He comments on why the 16th century Reformers identified the Roman Catholic Church, particularly the papacy, as the antichrist (see Westminster Confession of Faith), but suggests it would be best to interpret Revelation 13 in a more general way.

This book is easy to read, and to the point. However, as a commentary it is not easy to traverse. It would have been good if chapter headings, or any headings, included the Bible reference rather than having this hidden at the end of the included Biblical text.

This book is an excellent commentary for students of this daunting, and often misinterpreted, book of Revelation. In addition to personal study, notes included at the end make this a useful book for group study.

Revelation, Apocalypse Now and Then - Paul Barnett, Aquila Press, 1989, ($19.95 at Koorong).

The book of Revelation is daunting to most but this small commentary (157pages) is an excellent introduction and commentary. Paul Barnett, a retired Anglican bishop, is a NT scholar and his scholarship emerges in this book. He provides the reader with interesting historical information regarding the seven churches to which John sent this letter. He agrees that the author is the apostle John.

Revelation is 'one of the most neglected books of the NT' according to Barnett. He is probably right, although there have been a number of good commentaries published in recent years, including his, which have given confidence to students and preachers. Of course Revelation is far from neglected by certain groups within the church, and on the fringe. 'It becomes a preoccupation and obsession for these people'. I had one such person who was always telling me about the prophecy of the red heifer and the restoration of temple worship!

Barnett confronts the problems of interpretation head on. The first few chapters deal with the genre ('what kind of book?'), the symbolism (the 'code'), and the layout. He affirms most strongly that Christ and the gospel are at the centre of Revelation. The focus, he says, is upon what Christ has done in his death, resurrection and ascension, rather than the future battle of Armageddon.

The layout he proposes involves parallelism, with four sets of seven running in parallel- seals, trumpets, signs and plagues. With the exception of the signs, the rest are clear in the text of Revelation. Barnett labels these parallels 'tyranny', 'chaos', 'persecution' and 'destruction' respectively. His extensive knowledge of the NT emerges in his exegesis of chapters two and three. The problems faced by the churches in Asia were 'Jewish hostility, Caesar worship and heretical infiltration'.

As with most commentaries he deals with the different interpretations of this book viz, preterist, futurist, and historical. He finds something positive in each of these but agrees with none. He calls his interpretation 'prophetic-apocalyptic', while emphasising the need to account for how the first readers understood the text and the genre of literature.

On the millennium, Barnett points out that only once in the Bible (Rev 20:1-6) is 'one thousand years' mentioned, yet it has been a highly divisive issue. In stressing the symbolism of this book Barnett sees the millennium as 'beginning with the first resurrection (20:5), and ending with the second death (20:6)', and concludes that this is from Christ's resurrection until hell or the lake of fire.

Barnett does not deal with the OT background to Revelation to the extent found in other commentaries, even brief ones. In fact his emphasis on the historical situation of the first readers almost leads him to a preterist interpretation at times. That worship in Revelation is in a 'two- beat rhythm' seems to impress Barnett for some reason. Still, this is a concise, easy-to-read introduction and commentary to the Book of Revelation. An appendix listing numbers and their symbolical meaning is most helpful.

- These two Book Reviews on the Book of Revelation are from Dr. Dennis Muldoon.

ARCHIVAL....

Thirty Years in Fry Street Church- Part 3

By H W Ramsay

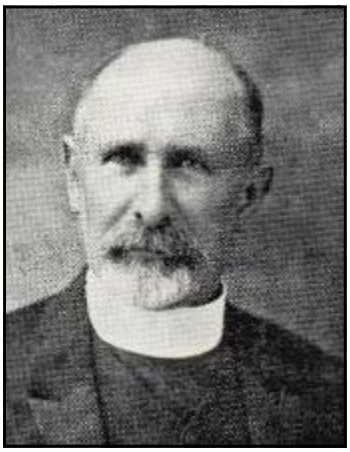
Former Communicants

The first sacrament of the pastorate was observed on 23 May 1915, when the Rev Jas Henry assisted. This was at Brushgrove…..At the first Sacrament there were 12 of the congregation at the table, 15 in all.

Sabbath Schools

Shortly after I commenced here I conducted five different services each Sabbath:
Sabbath School at 9:30 am Church 10:30 am;
Sabbath School at Brushgrove at 2pm; Service - Brushgrove 3pm; Service again at 7:30 pm

Every second Sabbath I stayed at Lower Southgate at night and held the evening service there. On Monday I went to Maclean, and spent the day with Mr Henry, who examined me very closely in Greek, Church History and Theology. During the fortnight I pursued my studies in these and other subjects, beside doing all the ordinary work of the charge in regard to preaching, visiting etc. Beside the three subjects mentioned, I was taking several other subjects under other teachers: Latin, Hebrew, Mathematics and others.



I gave books each year to those attending the Sabbath Schools, and for some years paid for them all myself, beside providing all the other material for the Schools, as Catechisms etc. This was a matter of several pounds a year. After some time, however, the attendances at each school diminished, and both Sabbath Schools were dropped.

When Mr and Mrs Donald Anderson came to Grafton they resuscitated the Grafton Sabbath School, and gathered in a fine lot of scholars. They carried on the work for a good number of years, assisted by Mr and Mrs David McPherson. When Mr. and Mrs Anderson relinquished the work, I again acted as Superintendent, until I was relieved by Mr Angus Gillies. His place has been taken now by Mr C P King. Miss Kearns still continues her valued work in the Sabbath School. The numbers attending are small again now, and some are not as regular in attendance as they might be. The labours of the teachers are worthy of more encouragement.

Bible Class in Grafton

This was very well attended for perhaps twenty years or more. In earlier days we had a splendid class, and a large number of attendants. In those days there were no high schools at Maclean or Coffs Harbour, and pupils came here right from the Bellinger and Maclean. Among these were Mr Alvan McIntosh, our student in Scotland, Mrs Neil MacLeod, wife of the minister at St George's, Mrs Colville, and the two daughters of Mr R J McDonald, Jean and Agnes.

Miss McPhee would regularly bring quite a number from her home (she used to take High School boarders), and there was always a number from the Manse in those days.

Latterly the class developed into a Fellowship meeting fortnightly, but now it has been decided that the Fellowship is to meet monthly and the minister is to have a class monthly.

Assembly's Welfare of Youth Committee

It is a pleasant reflection that the Assembly's Welfare of Youth Scheme has its origin in our Grafton Class. We commenced a Bible correspondence Class in connection with our Class work, and those who were too far away to attend sent in written homework. I announced the lessons set each month in the pages of the "Examiner" (the Grafton Daily Examiner) which were then open to us for such purposes. Soon, some of the Maclean folk began to send in the papers also, and finally it was taken up by the Assembly, and the Minister of Grafton became the Assembly's first Convener. That Committee, begun in a humble way without funds, has become a fairly large matter.

The Scripture Lessons in the Grafton Schools have been maintained through all the years since my arrival here. Also, especially in former years I visited quite a large number of country schools while on my visiting rounds. These included, at times:
Swan Creek, Ulmarra, Cowper, South Arm, Woodford Dale, Woodford Leigh, Lower Southgate, Southgate, Grafton Common, Rushforth, Bundarigo, Coutt's Crossing, Bushy Park, Coldstream, Tucabia, Gillett's Ridge, Lower Coldstream, and others.

Strangely enough I have never been able to do as much visiting with the car as when I had the horses and sulky. There are several reasons for this. A deal of work in Grafton has been outside the borders of our own church. Much has been in connection with visiting schools, the various hospitals here, and in connection with burials. I could have told many a tale of my experiences at the hospitals had I kept a record of them all. Some of them have been very strange. I am surprised many times to meet people whom I do not know who tell me that they remember with pleasure, and at times with profit, when I used to visit a certain school that they attended, or visited them in the General Hospital, or Clarence House, or Runnymede, or Maclean or some other hospital.

Country Services

These have been held at different places with varying degrees of success so far as outward appearances indicate. The first were held at the homes of Mrs John McPherson and Mrs Joseph Martin on the Orara; also at "Maxwelton", the home of the Maxwells at Upper Kangaroo Creek, where the Rev Isaac Mackay died; also at

Braunston in the homes successively of Mr George Martin, Mrs Whiting, and Mr Willmot; and at Lower Kangaroo Creek, and the School at Rushforth, and for many years at the residence of Mr Alex Watters. This latter meeting has been the most successful of all the country centres.
A bible class was conducted at Rushforth for many years, and the congregation there has been the one country station I have been able to hold. The trouble with most of them was that I was not able to give them the services on the Sabbath Day, owing to having to attend to Grafton and Brushgrove.

At Wooli there is always a good gathering and an appreciative one, when I am able to conduct services there at holiday time. Opportunities offered at different times to open out at such places as Halfway Creek, Coffs Harbour, Glenreagh; and at Upper Kangaroo Creek I was once offered half Sustentation fund collected there if I would undertake to give them one service every two months regularly, but it was considered wise to adhere to Brushgrove. But now the attendance at Brushgrove is very small.

Calls to other places

During my stay here I was offered two hearty calls, one to the Hunter and Barrington, and the other to Geelong. Both of these caused me great searching of heart, but it never appeared to me that there was a clear call from the Master to leave Grafton, and it seemed to be His will that I should have remained here hitherto. I felt that in the Providence of God I had been called to Grafton, and that it was my duty to remain here unless I had some clear indication that it was His will that I should go elsewhere.

"I have endeavoured, through all the years, to proclaim the old truths of the Word of God, and I hope that as long as God is pleased to spare me on earth, I will continue to do so."

Means of travelling

Thirty years ago the only means of travelling to Sydney was by steamer. Every year one had to attend the meetings in Sydney in this way, and the meetings with the return journey took nearly three weeks. In those days the meetings in Sydney could not commence before Thursday evening, now they begin on Tuesday evening.
After some time the (train) railway line came as far as Kempsey, and one could come there by train, and thence home by the large service cars which connected with the train. Then the railway reached Macksville, and eventually Grafton. But before that, all travelling to the Macleay, Hastings or Manning had to be done by horses, as also all the preaching tours on the Richmond, or most of them. So it was necessary for me in those days to have two horses always. I brought two with me, which I reared myself, from the Macleay, and afterwards I bought three others using five in all.

For fifteen years I always had my Sabbath lunch in the vehicle as I drove along as there was no time to lose in getting to the afternoon service. When there were sick calls on the way home, as often happened, the day would be a long one indeed. On one occasion I was just entering the church gate as the bells were ringing for the service to commence. I went straight into the pulpit and preached. Afterward the congregation provided a car, which proved a great convenience indeed, but I have not half as much travelling now as I had to do when I had the horses.

Ministers whom we have heard in our church during my ministry here:

Rev John Sinclair, Rev Win McDonald, Rev S P Stewart, Rev W N Wilson, Rev J D Ramsay, Rev I L Graham, Rev J C Robinson, Rev Arthur Allen, Rev Neil MacLeod, Rev J A Webster, Rev M C Ramsay, Rev J A Harman, Rev T M McClean, Rev D G C Trotter.
From Scotland, beside these:
Rev Jas' Henry, Rev Principal John MacLeod, Rev Geo' MacKay, Rev MacDonald, Rev Malcolm Galbraith, Rev Donald MacDonald, Mr D A MacDonald.
From Free Reformed Presbyterian Church: Rev H K Mack, Rev W R McEwan.

Every year we have had ministers assisting twice at Communion, and I have embraced every available opportunity of obtaining the services of other ministers of our church.

Conclusion

I have endeavoured, through all the years, to proclaim the old truths of the Word of God, and I hope that as long as God is pleased to spare me on earth, I will continue to do so. I hold the same gospel truths today as I did when I came here 30 years ago. The only difference is that, if anything, I hold them today with even firmer grasp, a deeper conviction of their truth, a greater tenacity. For the older I grow, and more experience I gain, the more do I believe that the position of our church is the right one. It has been my happy experience, year by year, to see some coming out openly on the side of the Lord, and there is no greater joy to a minister's heart than this. And when the day comes - and it may not be far distant - when God shall call me away, I hope to meet in the Glory Land, many with whom it has been my pleasure to worship in the Free Church at Grafton.

"Oh; if one soul from Anwoth
Meet me at God's right hand,
My heaven will be two heavens
In Immanuel's Land".

And I hope and pray that, through many long years to come, there may be in this church a long succession of faithful and godly ministers, and devoted and regenerated people to witness for the Lord Jesus Christ, and to live to the honour and glory of God.

Note: This edited material comes from a retyped Manuscript [2005] thought to be originally written in 1939. The Project was undertaken at the behest of Mrs Margaret Huckett, youngest child of Rev and Mrs H W Ramsay. Copies of the entire Mss are available from her, now residing in Wauchope, NSW [Address available from the Editor]

Run For Glory

VALUES - 3

When we talk about Values we need to know what is really valuable. We've seen that the Word of God is Valuable. It ought to be one of our central "values." And if we listen to the Bible, we'll find another Value – the Lord Jesus. This time we look at yet another "Value" the Bible brings before us – "*Faith*". Peter tells us in his first letter that our faith is of greater value than gold! In a Christian country, and among Christian friends we can become very laid-back about the value of the Christian Faith and the value of our own faith. We take it all for granted. But when you have to rub shoulders with those who don't share your faith and your values, you begin to realize how precious faith is. This is certainly the case if you mix with teenagers outside the Church. Adults still have a smattering of Christian Teaching. But some younger people today have no idea about our Faith. They've been brought up in a world influenced by evolutionary ideas, and anti–Christian propaganda. They have a non – Christian view of the world. And when you come across it, you realize how frightening it is. But you also realise what a blessing it is to have Christian faith.

The Kind Of Faith That's Precious.

And that suggests the first thing we need to consider – and that's t*he Kind of Faith That's Precious*. Today, I don't think there's a more misunderstood word than the word "*faith*". On the one side there are those who say without any qualification: "*Just have faith, everything will work out*". As long as you believe in *something*, everything will be all right. Faith doesn't have to be reasonable, or factual. Its just like a leap in the dark. On the other side, there are those who reject the idea of faith altogether. They say, "I don't live by faith. I live by facts. I only believe what I can see and touch. I reject all this mumbo jumbo about unseen realities. Give me science any day!"

How do we respond to those ideas? One thing we can say is that *faith without evidence was totally foreign to Peter's way of thinking*. In his second letter he says the disciples didn't make known cleverly invented stories when they told us about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He says "*We were eyewitnesses of his majesty*." [2 Peter 1:16]. Obviously he didn't subscribe to this modern notion that you can believe anything you like. *The Faith he wants us to have is a faith that based on evidence and fact.*

But its also clear here that he doesn't subscribe to the idea that you can't believe something you don't see and touch. Talking about Jesus in 1 Peter 1:8 he says, "*Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.*" These people to whom he writes hadn't seen Jesus. They had only heard about Him through the Word preached to them. But they'd been persuaded of its truthfulness, and they'd embraced Him as their Saviour. He subscribes to a faith that can be brought to us by Words and in particular, the Word of God about the Lord Jesus.

But this also enables us to see the sort of Faith Peter says is Precious. These people had heard the facts about Jesus and His Resurrection from the Dead. But *they had actually believed in Jesus for themselves.* They had come to rest and rely on Him as their Saviour and Lord. And that's the sort of faith he tells us is precious. The Christian Faith is precious; the Word of God is precious; Jesus himself is precious. But so is our grasping these truths for our very own.

Why This Faith is Precious.

Why is This Faith Precious? And I can think of a number of reasons why its precious – but I'll mention two. *It's precious because it's a Gift of God*. We have believed. But behind that act of faith is the grace and mercy of God that reaches back into eternity itself. Peter tells us in the opening words of this letter, that we believe because God has chosen us and sanctified us by His Spirit. How precious then is the faith in Christ that we have – that it should come to us as a result of the love and mercy of God the Father.

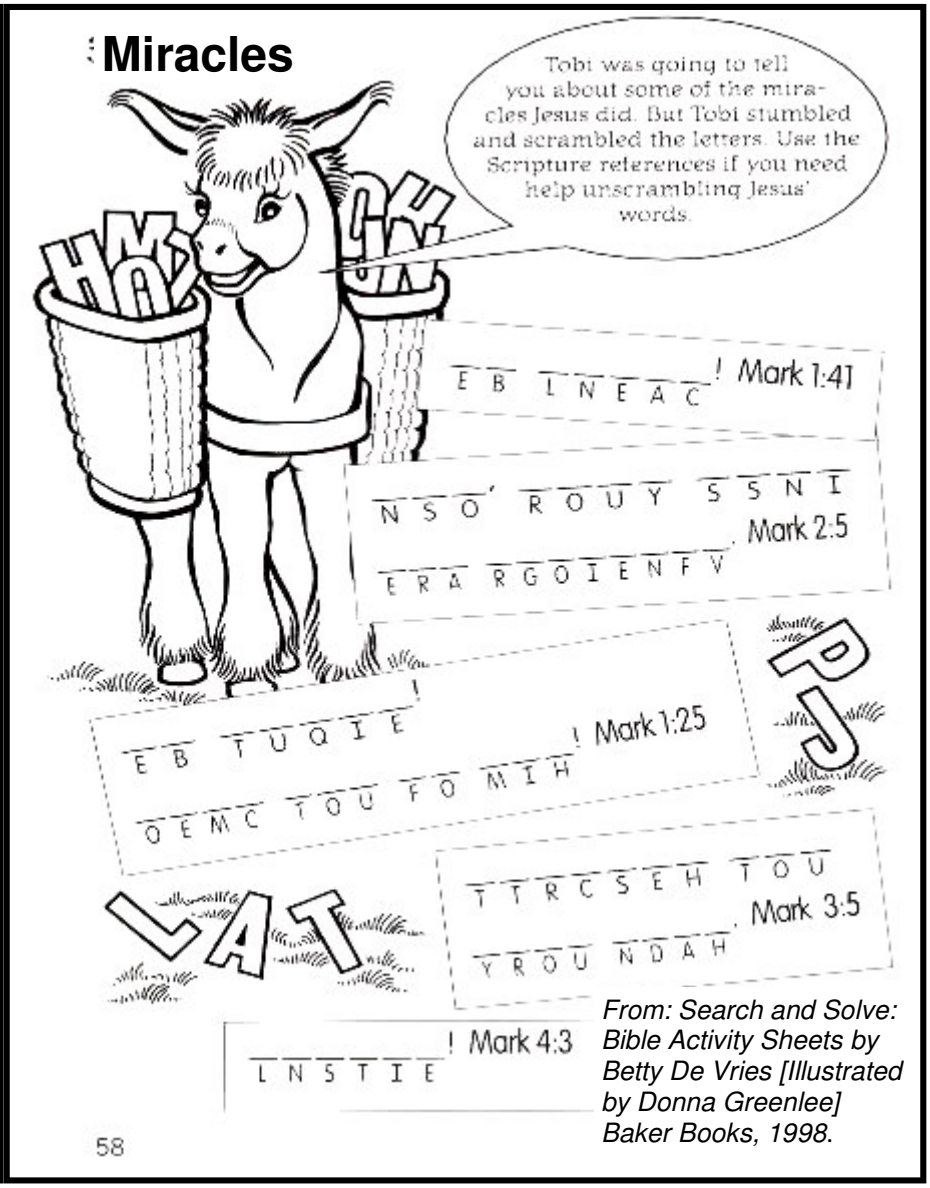
But our faith is precious because it brings us to Jesus. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sins, renews our wills, and *persuades* and *enables* us to embrace the Lord Jesus – to Call out to Him for our salvation. And when we, in our need, call upon the name of the Lord, that establishes a bond between ourselves and Him that will never be broken. The Apostle Paul says we're called "*into the fellowship of his Son*". What a precious Fellowship that is! There is nothing more important than it. It leads to eternal life.

What Happens to Those Who Have Precious Faith

Now you might think that because our faith is so precious God would carefully isolate those who have this faith – and preserve and protect them from anything that might endanger it. But Peter tells us here that that's exactly what He *doesn't* do. He tells us that sometimes he does exactly the reverse. He puts us into the refinery to test our faith, and get the impurities out of it! And the way he does that is to send *various trials to remove those impurities.* These trials make us depend more on God, and on the Lord Jesus. When we've got nothing else to hang onto to, we hang onto God more fully! And the great result is that our faith in God and in His Son becomes more genuine, pure, and complete – and more like the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. No one suffered more than he; and no one trusted more than he.

ACTIVITY PAGE.....

"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved - you and your household"- Acts 16:31



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

SEARCH WORK - JUNE 2007

SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE

Intermediate omit questions 4 and 6

ROMANS Chapter 14

1. For what purpose did Christ both die and rise and revive [live again]?
2. Of what does the kingdom of God consist?

Chapter 15

3. What verse in Psalm 69 does Paul quote to prove that Christ pleased not himself?
4. What four quotations does Paul make from the Old Testament to prove that the Gentiles would glorify God for his mercy?
5. What was the duty of the Gentiles who had partaken of the Jews' spiritual things?
6. Why did Paul ask the Romans to strive together with him in prayer? (3 verses)

Chapter 16

7. In what two respects were the Romans to be wise and simple respectively?
8. What had been kept secret since the world began but was now made manifest? (2 verses)

JUNIOR

GENESIS Chapter 11

1. Why was the city and the tower built in the land of Shinar called Babel?

Chapter 12

2. What did the Lord promise Abram if he left his country and his father's house? (2 verses)

Chapter 13

3. What part of the land did Lot choose when Abram and he decided to separate?
4. What did the Lord say to Abram after Lot separated from him? (3 verses only)

SEARCH WORK TO: **MRS I. STEEL**, PO Box 193, EPPING 1710. E-mail: iesteel@gmail.com

SYNOD - 2007

In some ways the Synod meeting was most satisfactory – few points of order, quiet debates, and good decisions. In other ways, it was disturbing – though what is put in those categories may depend very much on who writes the report! The editor did attempt to gain that balance by proposing that each major participant in the proceedings write a report of their business before the Synod. Unfortunately it was only a "gentleman's agreement" and at this point of time only a couple have submitted their reports.

The Rev. Peter Smith, the Retiring Moderator, opened the Synod with an address from Isaiah 53:3-5. The incoming Moderator, Dr. Rowland Ward, spoke on the topic: *"Law and Righteousness in Scripture and Confession."* He dealt with the doctrine of Justification by Faith, and recent attempts to reformulate it. Each morning thereafter the Moderator preached for about half an hour on the following topics: The Person of Christ in Romans 1:1-5; Love and Betrayal in John 13; and Love and Works in 1 Corinthians 13.

The Business of Synod was largely focused around matters that had their origin in the Southern Presbytery: An Overture to make Ministers members of the Session; the production of a declaratory statement about singing Psalms, the Creation Days, Marriage with a deceased wife's sister, and the Antichrist – and the alteration to the Questions and Formula [which office bearers have to agree to before admission to office]; Acts about Ministers' Retirement and how Sessions are to deal with absent and incapacitated members in Congregations; the admission of Mr. David Kerridge as a student for the Ministry; and finally, what to do with the proceeds from the sale of our Church in Hamilton.

Little time was spent on making ministers members of Session. Most were agreed that this should happen – though just how this is going to work out in practice remains to be seen. Much more time was spent on the production of the Declaratory Statement and the Questions and Formula, because most were against it and wanted to say so! At one point the Moderator pleaded for some from "the other side" to speak – he thought the debate was too lopsided! Our elder from Geelong probably gave the most sensible advice. He said, "If in doubt, don't" – and the projected revision was defeated by a substantial majority! The proposal to set the Minister's Retirement Age was defeated, and the Regulations about absent and aged and infirm members was so unclear, and probably unworkable, that the Synod rejected them. Sessions continue to use their own judgment in each case. The case of the Reception of Mr. David Kerridge as a student was dealt with in closed Court – as is required by our rules. The matter was finally sent back to the Presbytery. It may give David provisional recognition as a student and bring the matter before Synod later.

The destination of the money from the sale of the property at Hamilton [$400,000] generated considerable debate and feeling. The Presbytery wanted to give the money to the Knox-Glenhuntly congregation to buy a Church and Manse for the Sudanese who now number about 200 and worship in a Reformed Church. They wanted it to be an "open cheque" with no details of the projected building, or costs – said to be in the region of $1,000,000. Some believed, given the uncertainty of the Sudanese work, and the absence of detail, that it would be better for the money to be kept in a Synod Special account until the future became clearer. The voting was close [9-8] in favour of it being kept in a Synod fund – which certainly displeased some. In fact, the next day, another motion was put forward by a member of the Southern Presbytery that the money be put in the hands of the "8:14 Foundation" and made available through the Administration Committee whenever the Congregation needed it. This narrowly passed.
In between all this we had the Church and Nation Committee Report [which includes the Banner, Youth Work

etc]; the Inter - Church Relations Committee; and Delegates from other Churches [The Reformed Church in the Netherland [Liberated]; the Reformed Presbyterian Church; and The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia]. We also had the Missions Committee Report, and Missions evening – with speakers from the Reformation Translation Fellowship; MERF [Dr. Noel Weeks] and AIM [Rev. Trevor Leggott.] One of the Dutch delegates remarked after the Missions Evening [having sat through two days of discussion on all the other matters]: "This is what I wanted to hear; this is what our Churches talk about!" Do his words reveal our priorities?

Synod gave a hearty vote of thanks to the Hunter Congregation, and especially the ladies, for hosting the Synod, and providing excellent meals for those attending. It can only repay them, of course, by wanting to go back again next year!

GENERAL TREASURER

Mr. Alex Steel, General Treasurer

The Synod recorded its thanks to God for the sufficiency in financial matters the church had enjoyed during the past year. All Synod Committees had been able to meet their commitments from their Working Funds and the General Treasurer reported that the overall funds of the Synod increased during 2006 by $92,028 (5.8%) to $1,573,418, this mainly coming from returns on the investment of Capital Funds.

Apart from the confirmation of routine matters, decisions made included the granting of Stipend Assistance, on a needs basis, to three congregations (Armidale and Hawkesbury-Nepean $20,000 and Narre Warren $5,000) and approval of a new set of regulations for the "Capital Assistance Fund" (formerly the 8:14 Foundation). Details of the Capital Assistance Fund will be included in a future issue of the *Presbyterian Banner.*

The General Treasurer commented, that overall Synod finances were in a satisfactory state.

CHURCH AND NATION, YOUTH AND FELLOWSHIP

Convener: Dennis Muldoon

This Committee reported some significant developments during this past year with regard to the PCEA magazine, and the PCEA website www.pcea.org.au. It also reported on youth and family camps and ongoing youth ministries within the church.

As editor-in-chief of the 'The Presbyterian Banner' (TPB), Ray Murray has brought positive changes in the content and the mode of distribution of TPB. Many are now receiving this publication 'online' or having local representatives print off copies for their congregation, thus saving in postage. It is great to view full colour copies of TPB. Maybe we can have all colour copies in the future! It was encouraging to hear some say they now give a copy to all members of their congregation.

The PCEA website has been upgraded by Gavin Smith with the help of James Ramsay. The format has changed and the site is being made more interactive and user friendly. Each congregation can have their own site hosted on this official church website, currently for no cost. Keep clicking on this website to see further developments.

The church wide family camp in 2007 organised by Tom Reeve in Sydney was a blessing to many. Local church camps were also held with good attendance. Camps are an important part of church fellowship and the Committee encourages those who conduct camps for young and old with small grants.

Youth in the PCEA are provided with set work, essays and search work to guide them in their study of the Bible. Book and monetary prizes are given to encourage young people to complete this work. Children are also recognised by sending them a card on their birthday. Irene Steel and Margaret Kinder assist the Committee in this work.

DELEGATES TO SYNOD

Representatives from Other Churches: [L-R] Rev. Andrew Stewart [The Reformed Presbyterian Church]; Mrs Ria Nederveen-van Veelen and Mr. Jan Bronsema [The Reformed Church in the Netherland [Liberated]].

The Rev. Garry de Vries from the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, was also present and addressed the Synod on Tuesday afternoon, but was not present when the photographs were taken.

TAREE NEWS

Reuben Clive Martin, 4th son of Teresa daughter of Clive and Rosalie Alley and Andrew Martin was baptized on 13th May, 2007. His great-grandmother, Daphne Alley, was present.

LAW AND RIGHTEOUSNESS IN SCRIPTURE AND CONFESSION

Notes of Address as incoming Moderator of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, 7 May 2007 by Rev Dr Rowland S. Ward

1. Consensus

It is obvious but often overlooked that the Westminster Standards, intended for the Christian Church in England, Scotland and Ireland, are very much consensus statements. That is, they endeavour to avoid deciding between different schools of thought which fall within the acceptable bounds of the Reformed faith, and they are often content to agree in practical conclusions even if there are different theoretical underpinnings.

Let me give you some examples:

[1] In framing the Form of Presbyterial Church Government it was not found possible to agree about the theory of eldership since most of the English had no experience of eldership. Passages we think are a biblical basis for eldership were applied exclusively to the pastors. Consequently, the compromise was reached which gave a place to elders without requiring that they be regarded, as they were by the Scots, as true presbyters.


Dr Rowland Ward

[2] When preparing the Directory for the Public Worship of God the longest and most difficult debate was over whether it was essential to the observance of the Lord's Supper to be seated at a table. The Scots insisted on this, the English thought sitting in the pews was in order, and neither gave way. So, after more than two weeks debate (!), they agreed a compromise. The relevant section of the Directory reads: "…the table being before decently covered, and so conveniently placed, that the congregation may orderly sit about it, or at it, the minister is to begin the action…" The words 'about it' allowed for reception in the pew, and the words 'at it' for reception at the table.

[3] In framing the Confession the approach is to follow the infra-lapsarian order of decrees, that is, God's election logically follows the decree to permit the fall, but the supra-lapsarian position of some members, which viewed election as logically prior to the decree to permit the fall, thus emphasised God's sovereignty but ran the risk of suggesting God created men in order to damn them, is not condemned.

[4] Similarly, while justification has two parts – the non-imputation of sin and the imputation of Christ's righteousness - the phrasing of WCF 11.1 allows for some difference of view on imputation since the Reformed did not always express this in terms of the imputation of Christ's life of law keeping (active obedience). Among other ways of stating it was the view that we are counted righteous by virtue of union with Christ in his sacrificial death and justifying resurrection without reference to Christ's own perfect life (although of course that qualified him to be the perfect sacrifice for us).[1]

[5] In the basic structure of the covenant theology enshrined in the Confession there is some variation. WCF 7.1 seems to suggest man was created in an uncovenanted state and after his creation received the covenant of works/life, but WCF 19.1 appears to conflate the law written on the heart and the covenant arrangement of Genesis 2 as if he was created in covenant. Similarly, WLC 93 suggests a promise of life is attached to the keeping of the law written on the heart, but WCF 7.1 suggests the reward could only come by God condescending to enter into a post-creation covenant. Even the question of the covenant of redemption distinct from the covenant of grace is left undecided by the WCF. These studied ambiguities reflect the fact that a developed covenant theology was only 50 years old and would need another 30 years to reach a greater clarity on some points. It was sufficient for the purpose of a consensus creed in the 1640s to maintain the basic contours. Richard Muller puts it this way: '…the brief definition found in the Westminster Standards represents not a strict finalization of a dogma rigidly propounded, but a historical marker in an ongoing development. The formulators of the doctrine allowed for a significant flexibility in terms and definitions…' [2]

[6] Incidentally, while the precise nature of the creation days was not under any discussion in the 1640s, and no challenge from wider knowledge had arisen to give cause for it, one can note (4.1) the careful lack of definition of the length of the days beyond the language of Scripture.

These remarks are useful I think as they serve to keep us from a kind of approach that treats the Confession as the final word or the always-adequate word. The Confession is not Scripture. Nevertheless, we confess that its doctrine is Biblical.

2. Commitment

However, just because the Confession is a consensus creed does not mean that we can take bypaths off the highway it represents. It hardly accords with belief in a consensus creed to be magnifying issues not in it, something I hope our experience a generation ago with versions of Scripture has taught us. By the same token, what is in a Confession is what is important, and we need to be much in the main things it sets forth. If we affirm doctrines as Scriptural we need to maintain them. This is not to anathematise those Christians who differ from us, or even to regard as not Reformed those who have a different viewpoint on some matters which we hold, but it is to uphold the integrity of those who have taken vows before the Lord.

To ensure this we must train our students well, not simply in systematic doctrine but in historical context. Our Confession and Catechisms must not be museum pieces, reverenced but not used. Some 50 years ago the late Rev Arthur Allen of Sydney PCEA did much to contribute to recovering our self-conscious Reformed

character by importing copies of our Standards which were not then readily available in Australia. We had slipped a bit and it can happen again.

If the passing of time can also result in various traditions about the Confession's meaning arising, it is also important to be aware of how people can use some perfectly proper lack of definition to bring in, inadvertently or deliberately, revisions of the doctrines we confess.

In the conservative Presbyterian churches in the United States there has been considerable ferment on the subject of justification and related doctrines. The controversy is complicated by a lack of adequate understanding of the Confession and of Reformed orthodoxy from the classic period. You have a man like Dr Meredith Kline seeking to uphold the Confession's teaching of a covenant of works yet explaining that covenant in terms of a merit based legal scheme foreign to the Westminster Divines. You have Norman Shepherd rightly wanting to emphasise the filial relationship between God and Adam yet denying the legal and a covenant of works. In some respects they divide the truth between them. Add into the mix the debate over the New Perspective on Paul (NPP), and the recent prominence of Federal Vision teaching, and you can see how confusing things can get. Discussion is made no easier by those who are motivated by a bitter hostility to the OPC for other issues and see the current issues an easy target for more of the same. Again, ordinary believers may be easily alarmed either because they do not adequately grasp that the faith that alone justifies is never alone, or because they see that there is indeed a very real threat to the stability of a crucial Christian doctrine.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has published a Report on Justification received by its 2006 General Assembly, while the Presbyterian Church in America has prepared a Report for their General Assembly later this year. In Australia the influence of N.T.Wright's advocacy of a new perspective on Paul, particularly in Anglican circles, is evident. In Hobart one Presbyterian congregation recently lost several families who among other things have been influenced by the Federal Vision. It is probable that the impact will be less in rural areas, but we can expect some impact even in our own circles. The Presbyterian Church of Victoria discussed the New Perspective at its Commission last week. We can expect to hear more of it in coming days.

I thought therefore to try and outline some of the issues connected with the present ferment, with a view to gaining some benefit from the challenge to long established doctrine. It does not hurt us to think through our doctrines in the light of challenges which come from other believers, however mistaken we may consider them. In this way we may extract some advantage from controversy, even though in most respects the challenges were raised centuries ago and refuted then.

3. Contendings

Particularly over the last 30 years there have been voices raised suggesting a new look at Paul's theology which has resulted in the school of thought known as the New Perspective on Paul (NPP) although there are variations so we might more accurately speak of new perspectives. The more relevant formulation of the NPP for us is that advanced by N.T.Wright, currently the Anglican Bishop of Durham, and a man who far from being a liberal actually has definite evangelical and Reformed credentials and is surely on the side of the angels, even if we think him muddled or plain wrong on some matters.

The main features of the NPP may be summarized the following way.

Luther read Paul in the light of his controversy with Rome's teaching on merit and his own troubled conscience, and the Protestant church has tended to read Paul through Luther ever since. But Paul was not concerned with teaching on merit, since Judaism was not a merit-based religion, nor was Paul troubled by an introspective conscience.

Reading the NT against his understanding of Judaism in that period, Wright claims that the big question was, 'How would God vindicate the covenant people of God seeing that they lived as it were in exile under Roman rule rather than ruling over the nations as God had promised Abraham?' Justification for such a person carried the meaning of 'being vindicated' or 'in the right', and God's 'righteousness' meant his 'covenant faithfulness' and 'righteousness' in regard to a human being means 'membership in the covenant.'

For Wright, God had showed his faithfulness in Jesus who fulfilled the covenant promise God made to Abraham and took the curses of the covenant due to Israel. Jesus was the faithful representative Israelite who dealt with sin by paying the price for it. Before Jesus' resurrection loyalty to God's covenant was seen in faithful observance of boundary markers such as circumcision, food laws and Sabbath, not in a legalistic self-righteous way. Now it is seen in faith in the risen Jesus, thus opening the way for the inclusion of Gentiles. Those with such faith are among the people of God who will be vindicated before the world at the climax of history. The problem Paul confronted was not self-righteous legalism on the part of the Jews but their insistence that Gentiles observe the Jewish boundary markers of the ceremonial law.

For Paul justification was not about one's position before the bar of God's justice but about one's inclusion among the people of God. The judge was addressing the question 'Who are God's people?' not, 'Who is righteous in God's sight?' It was an ecclesiastical issue not a matter of declaring a person righteous before God. Further, in the law court the judge does not acquit a guilty person by reckoning someone else's righteousness to him. If he is in the right he is declared to be so. Thus, if he is among the covenant people he is in the right and will be vindicated on the basis of his entire life at the end. This vindication is not a declaration of moral uprightness but that the person is a true member of the covenant.

So far Wright and the New Perspective.

4. Critique

There are some things we can agree with right away. [1] Judaism was/is not a merit based religion in the teaching of the OT. God set his love on Israel according to his gracious election and not according to what Israel

deserved. The law was given to a redeemed people.[3] Jews did not doubt they were God's people. The chief issue in their eyes was remaining in his covenant with him – staying saved, if you will.
[2] We readily acknowledge the great significance of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God without the necessity of observing Jewish distinctives. The true Israel is not replaced but expanded by the inclusion of believing Gentiles. This was indeed the mystery hidden in earlier times (Eph 3:6).
[3] We need to recover an emphasis on the significance of the resurrection of Jesus for Christian faith and life and not treat it as a mere appendage to the atoning death of Jesus.
[4] We should not underestimate the excessive individualism in much of evangelicalism today which discounts the importance of the church as the people of God and fosters an inner-personal religious experience neglecting the call to loving communal service here and now. (Indeed, without denying the element of truth in the terms the NT does not call on people to receive Christ as 'personal Saviour', but calls on us to turn from our own sinful ways and acknowledge Jesus is now Ruler of the world, the only source of life and salvation.)

But on certain key issues we reject Wright's formulation.

[1] Although the OT faith of Israel was not merit based but rooted in the electing grace of God, the practical reality of law-keeping for salvation can easily be present, as we know in our personal experience and also from the NT. Roman Catholicism is not a religion of merit either, but emphasizes the necessity of God's grace, yet in effect human merit was very much to the fore in Luther's day as it is in our own. Neither Paul or Luther were combating those who held to a crass version of salvation exclusively by works. We need to be careful of caricatures, yet the NT is first hand evidence of attitudes, and much was clearly in the category of self-righteousness.
[2] The NT shows that Judaism was heavily influenced by the idea that law keeping was necessary to secure God's intervention for the nation's restoration. In this light, Paul's quite opposite emphasis - that God has acted already in Jesus Christ so that the life of real obedience flows from the crucified and exalted Jesus - is naturally set in the sharpest contrast to law keeping as the means of salvation.[4]
[3] While understanding NT Judaism correctly is important, discussing justification in the context of vindication before the world rather than before the bar of God's justice – which is the overall context of Scripture - is fundamentally flawed. Paul's views are formed by Scripture and in fact there are no references to rabbinical sources from the Second Temple period in his writing. Thus Paul's teaching of the pervasive depravity of humanity is not typical of NT Judaism or of Judaism today either. Further, neither the later Augustine or Luther or the other magisterial Reformers regarded Romans 7 as the struggle of a person with an introspective conscience seeking justification, but as expressive of the conflict in the already justified.[5]
[4] Ordinarily, 'righteousness' is what one ought to do, and is set over against sin, which is what one ought not to do. The one who does righteousness is righteous (1 Jn 3:7). The good spelled out in the law is what Jews and non-Jews alike must do and all will be judged accordingly (Rom 1:18-3:20). Understanding righteousness as covenant faithfulness just does not fit in many contexts.
[5] There is also a righteousness which is extraordinary. It is 'from God' (Rom 3:21; 1 Cor 1:30; Phil 3:9), it is a 'gift' (Rom 5:17) and enables God 'to be just and yet the justifier of whoever believes in Jesus' (Rom 3:25-26) since it is through the obedience of Christ that sinners are made righteous (Rom 5:19). Wright may say, as he does say, 'Righteousness is not an object, a substance or a gas that can be passed around the courtroom.'[6] Yet there we have it in Scripture as God's gift grounded on Christ's obedience, and all the cries of 'legal fiction' cannot remove it. Consequently, the reality of imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer, however absurd it may seem, is not an unbiblical category although there may be different ways of stating it, some more adequate than others.
[6] In Scripture justify/justification is mostly law court language, a declaration one is righteous and thus it is the opposite of condemnation (Prov 17:15; Rom 5:16; 8:34). In salvation contexts it is not a declaration of righteousness at the end of a process of moral renovation, but it is the declaration of righteousness before the bar of God's justice here and now. It is a once-for-all-time declaration of a right standing with God so that peace with God is enjoyed now (Rom 5:1), and the wrath of God will not be experienced in the future (Rom 5:9).
[7] If we speak, as we may, of a future justification, then it is only the public recognition of what is granted in God's grace in this life now when we come to faith in Jesus Christ. Wright's view appears to be that Christ's death and resurrection sets his people free from the guilt and power of sin, and the work of the Spirit enables them to conform to God's law so that in the end a favourable verdict is secured and they are vindicated in the Judgement. While Wright rejects the merit of the believer's life since his good deeds are wrought through the Spirit, yet it is hard to escape the view that in the last analysis the focus is on our own covenant keeping.[7]

In reviewing the NPP Michael F. Bird's summary is very much to the point: 'Paul's entire conception of Christ, the law, and salvation is mystifying apart from the assumption that he also attacked a form of grace-works synergism that was implicit in the attempt to force Gentiles to adopt a Jewish lifestyle.'[8]

It is also helpful in discussing these issues to recognise the value of biblical theology so that we do not tend to treat the benefits received from Christ as successive links in a chain, as we sometimes seem to do in our systematic analysis.[9] Rather, the union and communion the believer has with Christ is manifested in many benefits, as the Larger Catechism puts it. These are not links in a chain accessed one after the other but complementary – distinct from each other yet inseparable, since Christ cannot be divided and those united to him share in all his benefits.[10] To the same effect is Calvin's comment concerning union with Christ: 'We do not', he says, 'contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body – in short because he deigns to make us one with him. For

this reason we glory that we have fellowship of righteousness with him.'[11]

This approach enables us to more convincingly say that the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer is not a legal fiction but a benefit of union with Christ, and that justification by faith does not render sanctification unnecessary, since both justification, including imputation of righteousness, and sanctification are each among the benefits that are ours by virtue of our union with the crucified and risen Saviour. Thus, John 'Rabbi' Duncan rightly states: 'Justification by faith is the meeting-point of many doctrines, a rallying centre of theology; but it is not the foundation doctrine.'[12] That it is the meeting point of many doctrines makes the NPP so significant in its potential impact. Duncan also says that the Person of Christ is fundamental, and we might add, that union with Christ is at the heart of any Biblical doctrine of salvation. We ever need to remember that we are not saved by believing in justification by grace through faith, but we are saved by believing in a Person.

Norman Shepherd

Another part of the current confusion relates to the teaching of Norman Shepherd who was groomed as the successor to Professor John Murray at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and taught there 1962-81. Shepherd noted that Murray had not dealt with the statements about being justified by works found in the Epistle of James. His own endeavour to deal fairly with this material led to a significant reworking of the traditional understanding of covenant and justification.[13] I think it rather clear that the influence of G.C.Berkouwer, under whom Shepherd did some post-graduate studies, is evident, since Shepherd came up with the idea, that is found in some Dutch Reformed theology, that the covenant of works is wholly gracious and that any concept of work or merit in the covenant relationship, whether with Adam, Christ, or believers is alien to Scripture. Like the Torrance brothers he stressed the filial and the obligation of love and faithfulness on the part of both God and man in the covenant. He rejected a covenant of works and posited a covenant of grace. The life Adam received and the life he was promised are not clearly connected with an obedient probation. The obligation in the covenant today is the same obligation Adam pre-fall. In short Christ has achieved forgiveness by his death, but it is easy to suppose we are put in the situation where our covenant faithfulness is the way to salvation. Shepherd does not affirm the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer, while his faith/faithfulness language makes it east to suppose a dual instrumentality of faith and works for salvation. It's not a very satisfactory formulation.

Federal Vision

The Federal Vision (also known as the Auburn Avenue theology from the church in Louisiana where it came to prominence at a pastors' conference in January 2002) has many similarities with NPP and with Norman Shepherd. Leading persons include Steve Wilkins, Doug Wilson, Rich Lusk, James B. Jordan and Ralph A. Smith. It is not a monolithic group, but generally shares an interest in the Trinity as the pattern for the divine-human relationship. As with Shepherd there is one covenant of grace beginning pre-fall with Adam. There is a high church emphasis, including in liturgy and sacramental practice, which deviates in some measure from Presbyterian principles.[14]

5. Conclusion

Looking now to a review of these teachings it is easy to see that one's view of the God's relationship with Adam pre-fall impacts on our understanding of justification. That some have rejected a covenant of works altogether may in part be attributed to reaction from poor formulations. While our Confession is not full it does give the major contours. In regard to the first covenant with man, we affirm that it was one arising from the divine benevolence and required the obedience of Adam as the pathway to life. We should not represent that relationship as one in which Adam was a servant who could attain sonship by obedience,[15] any more than we should represent it as working for wages.[16] Rather, Adam was the created son of God (Luke 3.38) who would receive his inheritance of life in the pathway of obedience, not because he deserved it but because God is good and desires to crown his son's life with abiding blessing.

Adam's disobedience plunges the race into misery. To bring redemption both full satisfaction for sin and the accomplishment of perfect obedience will be necessary. We cannot do this but Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God in our nature, can and does, so that we may receive in him the promised inheritance as a free gift. Our sins are not counted against us but are imputed to the sinless Christ and he pays the price for them, while his righteousness is imputed to believers.

We may locate this imputed righteousness in the obedient law-keeping of Jesus Christ (what has been called his *active* obedience) rather than in his obedience in his death (what has been called the *passive* righteousness since it involved suffering). This is the traditional form enabling us to say that justification is not simply God treating us "just as if I'd" never sinned but also "just as if I'd" fully obeyed, which, in Jesus, is true. We may speak of this as an alien righteousness, wrought outside of us by Christ, so long as we also remember that this alien righteousness is ours along with all other saving benefits by virtue of union with Christ.[17] Theologically we are on the mark but biblically we should locate Christ's righteousness in the vindication he received in his resurrection. The crediting of righteousness is intimately lined with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead in Rom 4:24 and so we immediately go on to read that 'he was handed over to death because of our offences and raised to life for our justification' (Rom 4:25). If Adam brought condemnation for all through his one act of disobedience, Jesus, by his one act of righteousness/obedience – his obedience to the command to die which summed up the whole course of his life – has gained justifying life (Rom 5:18-19). Rejected of men, but accepted by the Father, he is now the Righteous One. 'God made him who had no sin was made sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor 5:21).

This is our faith. Here is our confidence.

Footnotes:

1.The omission of the word 'whole' before 'obedience' when the Assembly was revising the Thirty-nine Articles in 1643 was regarded as leaving room for such views. While not accepted at that point, the word is omitted in the corresponding section (11.1) of the Confession in 1646. Note Chad B. Van Dixhoorn's

(reluctant) conclusion that the consensus was intended in his PhD noted in J.R.Daniel Kirk, 'The Sufficiency of the Cross' *SBET* 24.1 (2006) 35-39; also in *Justification: A Report from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Willow Grove, 2007) 141-145, in which, while recognising Van Dixhoorn's conclusion, reliance is also placed on the customary sense given in the OPC as determining that the imputation of Christ's active obedience is required in the OPC. (J. Gresham Machen's famous dying words, 'Thank God for the active obedience of Christ, no hope without it' are relevant, as he was the key leader of those who founded the OPC.) Note the interesting debate on justification in September 1643 outlined in Chad B. Van Dixhoorn, *A Day at the Westminster Assembly* (London: Congregational Memorial Hall Trust (1978) Ltd, 2005), especially p. 23. In the Independents' revision of the WCF called the *Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order* (1658) one sees a very explicit insistence on the imputation of Christ's entire life of obedience as well as his death.

2. Richard A. Muller in R.A.Muller & R.S.Ward, *Scripture and Worship* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2007) 70.

3. Cf. the answer to Shorter Catechism 44: 'What does the preface to the ten commandments teach us?'

4. This point is well made by a former supporter of the NPP in Francis Watson, "Not the New Perspective" – an unpublished paper delivered at the British New Testament Conference, Manchester, September 2001. http.www.abdn.ac.uk/divinity/articles/watsonart.hti accessed 5 Jan 2004.

5. One might note the essentially similar positions on justification in Augustine, Luther, Calvin and Wesley outlined in Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 3-87.

6. N.T.Wright, *What St Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1997) 98.

7. Notice the comment of Herman Ridderbos: 'Every attempt to make certain reductions from the absolutely unanalytical character of this justification of the ungodly, whether understanding justification as an anticipatory pronouncement on the ground of the subsequent ethical transformation of the ungodly, or by looking on the judicial aspect of the work of God in justification in unity with the ethical aspect of the work of God in sanctification, indwelling, etc., must be rejected as a violation or obscuring of the specific significance of Paul's pronouncement.' *Paul: An Outline of his Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 174-175:

8. Michael F. Bird, *The Saving Righteousness of God* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007) 112.

9. Hugh Martin (1821-85) sagely observes: 'Now it is surely injudicious and impolitic for defenders of the faith to discuss any scriptural doctrine, and particularly to profess to do so fully and exhaustively, outside of any greater category to which the doctrine properly and natively belongs. For by doing so they place it in a position of unnecessary danger, and assign to themselves a greater difficulty in defending it than Scripture assigns to them.' - *The Atonement in its Relation to the Covenant, the Priesthood, the Intercession of our Lord* (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1976) 9-10

10. So Richard. B. Gaffin, Jr, 'Biblical Theology and the Westminster Standards' in *WTJ* 65 (2003) 173ff.; also Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Downers Grove 1993) 177ff

11. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* [trans F.L.Battles] (Philadelphia: Westminster 1960) 3.11.10.

12. John M. Brentnall, *'Just a Talker' Sayings of John ('Rabbi') Duncan* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1997) 102.

13. In a letter to Allan M. Harman 19 December 1980 Shepherd so explains the origin of the controversy that began in 1975.

14. On true Presbyterian principles of baptism see my review of L.B.Schenck's *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant* in *The Confessional Presbyterian* 2 (2006) 181-184. On worship see my essays on The Directory for the Public Worship of God in R.A.Muller & R.S.Ward, *Scripture and Worship* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2007) 85-140.

15. As in the theologies of Southern Presbyterians like J.H.Thornwell and R.L.Dabney contra J.L.Girardeau and R.A.Webb; or as in R.S.Candlish of Scotland opposed by T.J.Crawford.

16. As in Charles Hodge and Abraham Kuyper.

17. R.B.Gaffin, *op. cit.*, 178

BETWEEN YOU AND ME .....

Changes

This issue gives some coverage to our recent Synod - and we trust that more reports will be forthcoming from Conveners of Committees. We also hope to be able to print, according to Synod's instructions, the Retiring Moderator's Sermon. We have decided to reproduce entirely in one issue the incoming Moderator's address to the Synod. This, we believe, will do more justice to the address than breaking it up into two installments. As a result of this, some of our regular features have had to be held over.

Some of you may have already noticed that the Church Website has changed, and is currently under reconstruction. If you visit it, you will find Tabs named "Home", "Articles" "Magazine", "Magazine [Old]" and "Downloads". To obtain a pdf copy of The Presbyterian Banner, you need to go Downloads and click on The Presbyterian Banner, and you will find old and current copies of the magazine in pdf format.

What will be included on the Magazine Page remains to be seen. Those who are organizing the website have assumed responsibility for the design and content of the page. One thing is clear though - the "old" website of the magazine is now obsolete and will no longer be accessible. It bore the marks of a learner in the mysteries of web design, but I certainly enjoyed the challenge of putting it together.

One consequence of this may well be that those who have been reading the "Banner" on the web will not enjoy the advantage of "advance articles" or additional material. I tried to put up forthcoming articles a month in advance on the web! I was also able to include additional material not published in the magazine. We'll now try to include this in the magazine.

The *Presbyterian Banner* *is* the official magazine of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. The PCEA was established in 1846 and adheres to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) as its doctrinal standard.

Literary contributions are welcome although a stamped envelope should be included for a response to unsolicited material. Submission by email is preferred.

Unsigned articles are by the Editor. The opinions expressed in signed articles are those of the authors not necessarily of the editor or the PCEA.

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