THE PRESBYTERIAN BANNER

August, 2007

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***Devotion*: "Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity."**
Joel 2:13

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PCEA - GEELONG

FEATURES

ARTICLES

DON'T FORGET
The Huguenots, and St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, 23rd August, 1572

THE MINISTRY OF GIVING - 1

Rev. George Ball continues his Study of 2 Corinthians

Few things test a person's spirituality more accurately than the way he uses money. Few subjects are as unpopular in the church as that of the Christian and his giving. Few subjects are as important as this. Paul devotes two whole chapters [8 and 9] to the ministry of giving – obviously a major point in the letter. Some even believe this is the main section of the book and the primary purpose of the letter.

These chapters must be understood in the context of Paul's appeal for the needy believers in Jerusalem and Judea (ie. the "mother" church). They had hit hard times, perhaps because of famine, prejudice and/or persecution. When Paul went up to Jerusalem after his conversion the leaders of the church approved of his ministry among the Gentiles and required of him only "to remember the poor" (Gal.2: 10). This was the very thing that he was eager to do – and indeed which Christ assumed we all should do (See also Acts 11:27-30; and 24:17). Hence this appeal to the Corinthian church (ie. the "daughter" church). He had previously given instructions to the Corinthians about "the collection" (see 1 Cor. 16:1-3), and now in these chapters he wants to tidy up this piece of unfinished business – get the money collected and delivered.

One of the fascinating things about these two chapters is that Paul talks about money without once mentioning the word! Instead he speaks of "sharing", "ministering", "offering", "gift" and above all he mentions **"grace**" no less than 10 times! Obviously a key word when it comes to giving. Let's note then some of the principles behind giving (or ministering, or sharing! etc.).

1. The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ informs our Standard of Giving (vs.9).

How much should we give? A tithe (10%)? More? Less? Paul reminds us of the supreme example of generosity. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." This is now the plimsoll line. Our giving is to be inspired and instructed by the grace of our Lord. Viewed in this light how then can we be mean or stingy?

Dr. Paul White, the Jungle Doctor, tells of two African lepers who were desperately eager to help the missionaries. Their hands were so eaten away with the leprosy that they were just bandaged stumps. For several weeks they worked in the sawpit, sawing logs into boards for the extension of the bush hospital. When they had finished, each man was given his wages. The doctor noticed them dividing it into piles of silver. They explained that half was for the Lord. "But that's too much. God only asks for a tenth". "But, Bwana", one of them quickly replied," we love him far more than that."

2. The Grace of God is the Root of our Giving (vs. 1-7)

The Macedonian churches (ie. Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea) are here commended as excellent examples of liberality. Others regarded these churches as the poor cousins.

But out of these poor congregations as a result of the gospel of grace came a strong plea to give (vs.4). They were not happy to be overlooked when the collection was going round! (And the implication is clear – if that was their attitude – then the Corinthian attitude should be nothing less!). And their giving gave evidence of grace because it was: -

Joyful (vs.2 and 9:7). Despite their test of affliction and extreme poverty they joyfully contributed to the relief of the needy in Jerusalem. When you give do you do it gladly or grudgingly?

Sacrificial (vs.3). They gave not only according to their ability but beyond it. Not that it is right to go into debt in order to give to the Lord's work, nor to deprive dependants of the necessities of life. But they obviously deprived themselves of some "extras" in order to help others. We are to give in proportion to what we have – not what we don't have. (vs.12). The Lord never asks us to give what we do not have or contribute beyond our means.

Voluntary (vs.3). It was a free will offering. They were not bullied or coerced or commanded by the apostle (see vs.8). Their giving reflects the voluntary nature of God's grace to us in Christ. Is your giving something you do wholeheartedly and willingly?

Unto the Lord (vs.5). They gave as unto the Lord – though it was destined for the poor relief in Jerusalem. So we must always remember to whom we are giving. When we give we are not merely adding to the church budget, nor are we giving to support the minister, nor are we merely giving to a Mission. One writer puts it well. "True Christian giving is triangular: we give first to the Lord, then for something or someone. To see giving in this way removes any sense of manipulation on the part of the giver, and removes any sense of embarrassment on the part of the receiver." Do you see your offering as an act of offering yourself afresh to the Lord?

3. Giving is the Fruit of God's Grace (vs.6-7).

We can readily recognise that faith and knowledge and love is the fruit of grace in the life of the believer (vs.7). We understand how important it is to grow in these areas. Paul adds; "see that you excel in this gracious work also". In other words standing alongside faith in Christ, knowledge of his Word, diligence in his service, there must also be excellence in giving! A mature Christian is one who is serious about Christian stewardship. Have you ever considered giving as a spiritual gift? Do you understand that you Christian friend probably have this gift? Are you seeking to improve it?

4. Giving Helps Express Equality Among the People of God (vs. 13-15).

Christian giving to the needy is not designed to transfer the strain from one to another, but to share out the strain more evenly. Generous giving may not remain one way traffic for long. Those who relieve the pressure on others may, at some later date, require aid themselves.

Such giving also expresses something precious in the body of Christ – one part helping another. In this case it was the (largely) Gentile churches helping the (largely) Jewish church in Jerusalem. Though separated by hundreds of miles and land and sea, they were one in Christ Jesus. While we have undoubted obligations to support the needs at home, we should never close our hearts to the needs of the distant parts of the church. Such giving helps express the solidarity between churches.

" Christian giving to the needy is not designed to transfer the strain from one to another, but to share out the strain more evenly. Generous giving may not remain one way traffic for long.".

All Financial Matters in the Church Must Be Transparent (vs. 16-24).

Here Paul discusses the practical matter of taking up and transporting the collection. It was probably a considerable sum. He is at pains to do what is right and to be seen to be doing what is right. He is careful to install a system of checks and balances to avoid suspicion, temptation and possible criticism. He appoints three "wise" men – ie. Titus and two others. Men of proven reputation (see vs. 16-18 and 22). It's a timely reminder that the task of treasurers and deacons is a responsible one. No one single person ought to be responsible for handling the money. It should involve at least two competent and spiritual people. Even the trustworthiest treasurer needs others to work with him in counting the money and signing cheques so that the right thing is done in the sight of the Lord and also in the sight of men. How are things done in your church? We need to be squeaky clean!

JOHN M. L. YOUNG ON MISSIONS ...

"The Church is to propagate the Church. Its mission is to reproduce itself, to multiply through its individual members witnessing the redemptive message of Christ to their neighbors, through its corporate witness to the community, and through its missionaries sent forth to the uttermost parts with the good news that Jesus is the Son of God who will save all who come unto Him in faith. This is the eternal purpose of God, that the Gentiles should be made fellow members of the one body of Christ, by the preaching of the gospel to the nations, not by the angels but by the Church [Eph. 3:10], that both men and angels should see the manifold wisdom of God in planning it this way." [p 106]

"A native church must not only share in the life of the country, but, to be a true church, it must have Christ's life within its members. There are native churches founded on erroneous concepts of Christ and His gospel that have reached self-support and self-government and, to a measure, are self-propagating. It is in this last named area, however, that the church without the inner life of Christ will most readily be seen to fall short of its goal. Without the indwelling Christ, a church may carry His name but will lack the motivating power to do its utmost to spread His gospel." [p 120]

BLOGGING ABOUT…

THE ACCURACY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

As the following news item shows, Jeremiah 39 has now become a very significant chapter in the confirmation of the accuracy of the Old Testament. It confirms a small detail – and the implication is that if the small, insignificant details are confirmed, then the more significant details are correct.

We believe the accuracy of the Old Testament on a far greater authority than that of archaeological and historical discoveries. We believe it because the Lord Jesus teaches us that it is the Word of God written. Because of this, we believe that every detail will finally be demonstrated to be true. As this process of confirmation goes on, it's exciting to notice the examples that come to light. Such is the recent discovery in Britain, and reported in the Telegraph on the 10th July, 2007……

"The sound of unbridled joy seldom breaks the quiet of the British Museum's great Arched Room, which holds its collection of 130,000 Assyrian cuneiform tablets, dating back 5,000 years.

But Michael Jursa, a visiting professor from Vienna, let out such a cry last Thursday. He had made what has been called the most important find in Biblical archaeology for 100 years, a discovery that supports the view that the historical books of the Old Testament are based on fact.

Searching for Babylonian financial accounts among the tablets, Prof Jursa suddenly came across a name he half remembered - Nabu-sharrussu-ukin, described there in a hand 2,500 years old, as "the chief eunuch" of Nebuchadnezzar II, king of Babylon.

Prof Jursa, an Assyriologist, checked the Old Testament and there in chapter 39 of the Book of Jeremiah, he found, spelled differently, the same name - Nebo-Sarsekim. Nebo-Sarsekim, according to Jeremiah, was Nebuchadnezzar II's "chief officer" and was with him at the siege of Jerusalem in 587 BC, when the Babylonians overran the city.

The small tablet, the size of "a packet of 10 cigarettes" according to Irving Finkel, a British Museum expert, is a bill of receipt acknowledging Nabu-sharrussu-ukin's payment of 0.75 kg of gold to a temple in Babylon. The tablet is dated to the 10th year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, 595BC, 12 years before the siege of Jerusalem.

Evidence from non-Biblical sources of people named in the Bible is not unknown, but Nabu-sharrussu-ukin would have been a relatively insignificant figure. "This is a fantastic discovery, a world-class find," Dr Finkel said yesterday. "If Nebo-Sarsekim existed, which other lesser figures in the Old Testament existed? A throwaway detail in the Old Testament turns out to be accurate and true. I think that it means that the whole of the narrative [of Jeremiah] takes on a new kind of power."

Cuneiform is the oldest known form of writing and was commonly used in the Middle East between 3,200 BC and the second century AD. It was created by pressing a wedge-shaped instrument, usually a cut reed, into moist clay. The full translation of the tablet reads:

"[Regarding] 1.5 minas [0.75 kg] of gold, the property of Nabu-sharrussu-ukin, the chief eunuch, which he sent via Arad-Banitu the eunuch to [the temple] Esangila: Arad-Banitu has delivered [it] to Esangila. In the presence of Bel-usat, son of Alpaya, the royal bodyguard, [and of] Nadin, son of Marduk-zer-ibni. Month XI, day 18, year 10 [of] Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon."

- Nigel Reynolds, The Telegraph (UK) - 10/07/2007

ISAAC NEWTON IN THE NEWS

When I was at University we had to study the ideas and the writings of those who laid the foundations - or at least raised the questions - of modern philosophy and science. I can recall [!] having to read the writings of ancient Greek Philosophers who raised many of the issues still being discussed today. What we were not taught was the religious or "theological" background of these writers. We were given the impression that they were detached, neutral, scholars attempting to give answers to the questions of life.

In the light of this misrepresentation of these writers, it's good to see that the theological background and thought of the great scientist, Isaac Newton, is being recognized. and displayed. Newton, of course, is recognized as laying the foundation for modern physics, astronomy, mathematics and optics. What is not so widely known - and emphasized - is that he was a sincere Christian, and a diligent Bible Student.

This situation is being redressed by a display of Newton's theological writings for the first time in - of all places - Jerusalem! According to one Report [Associated Press, June 18, 2007 - "Papers Show Isaac Newton's Religious Side"], "three-century-old manuscripts by Isaac Newton calculating the exact date of the apocalypse, detailing the precise dimensions of the ancient temple in Jerusalem and interpreting passages of the Bible " have gone on display. The Report goes on: "The documents, purchased by a Jewish scholar at a Sotheby's auction in London in 1936, have been kept in safes at Israel's national library in Jerusalem since 1969. Available for decades only to a small number of scholars, they have never before been shown to the public." And the comment made on these writings is this: They "lay bare the little-known religious intensity of a man many consider history's greatest scientist…… he appears as a scholar of deep faith who also found time to write on Jewish law -- even penning a few phrases in careful Hebrew letters -- and combing the Old Testament's Book of Daniel for clues about the world's end."

On this latter issue, apparently he came to the conclusion, based on the Book of Daniel, that it would occur no earlier than 2060. He said: "It may end later, but I see no reason for its ending sooner ….This I mention not to assert when the time of the end shall be, but to put a stop to the rash conjectures of fanciful men who are frequently predicting the time of the end, and by doing so bring the sacred prophesies into discredit as often as their predictions fail." He also believed that the Jews would return to the Holy Land before the world end - which helps explain the Jewish interest in his writings.

It seems to come as a great surprise to some that this great scientist should be a man of faith, and study the Bible so carefully! They talk about his "religion" over against his "science." They seem to think he was a great scientist despite his religion. What they don't realize is that they too have a faith that informs and guides their science. They are no more neutral, and "scientific", than Newton. The only difference is that Newton had a faith that harmonizes with his science; they have a faith that would destroy the very possibility of science.

A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

On the evening of August 9, for the first time ever, the leaders of Australia's two major political parties have agreed to speak live to Christians across the nation.

The Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader will address church and denominational leaders at the National Press Club in Canberra, with the event to be web-cast simultaneously to congregations meeting in locations throughout Australia.

It's most important that we honour Mr Howard and Mr Rudd's time and commitment to the Christian constituency by listening to their addresses and praying for the upcoming Federal election. Let's make the Christian vote count!This is a 'not to be missed' event on the Christian calendar which gives us the opportunity to help shape how our nation is governed

The registration system for 'Federal Election 2007: Make it Count' is up and running at www.acl.org.au and we're asking you to get your church to register for the event as soon as possible. Just go to our website at www.acl.org.au and click on the 'Make it Count' banner. You'll find a whole section devoted to the event and registration process. There are all the details you need to know about the event and why we're holding it, as well as technical information for receiving the web-cast.

The church or Christian organisation you are a part of will also be able to register and receive a user name and password to take part in the August 9 event.

Below you'll find a link to brochure for the event and also a powerpoint slide which can be screened at your church to let the congregation know the local details for watching the web-cast.

There are three different versions of both the brochure and the slide to cater to people on Eastern Standard Time (NSW, Vic, Qld, Tas, ACT), Central Standard Time (NT, SA) and Western Standard Time (WA will receive a delayed web-cast at 7.30-9.30pm their time)

Please download a powerpoint slide and a brochure for your time zone:

brochure powerpoint (NSW, Vic, Qld, Tas, ACT)
brochure power point (SA, NT)
brochure powerpoint (WA)

This is a unique chance for Christians to hear first-hand from our nation's leaders, but we need your involvement to maximise its effect. Please do all you can to encourage your church to be involved and circulate this email to your friends.
Thank you for your support.
- Richard Thackway, Territory Director

POSITIVE CHRISTIANITY

It is easy to be a critic of present-day Christianity; it is difficult to be an earnest Christian. A religion which is a mere negation ineffective and unsatisfying.

Christianity is the most positive of all religions. There were many positive interventions of God in human history in pre-Christian days. The incarnation, vicarious obedience and death of the Son of God were most outstanding interventions.

The Lord Jesus enunciated the great positive principles of Christianity. His followers were men of definite beliefs, whose trust was not in negations but in the living Redeemer. Those early Christians, like all true believers, experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Christ was to them a present reality and the Holy Spirit was, likewise, a living Person.

The definiteness of their doctrinal beliefs which centred in the glorious Person and work of the Lord Jesus was their greatest defence against the tenets of heathendom; their fixed faith in the Son of God was a shield against the seductions of heathen philosophers; the reality of the spiritual change which they had undergone gave them a distinct assurance that the Christian faith was Divinely true, for each could say: "One thing I know that whereas I was blind, now I see".

The faith which led them to plead the merits of the glorious Redeemer, and thus obtain blessings for themselves and for others, they regarded as indispensable; their personal experience of the veracity of God's Word was a potent antidote against infidelity; and their sacrifice lives were their most powerful apologetic.

A revival of the spirituality and orthodoxy of Apostolic Christianity is needed greatly now. In family, church and state there is no adequate substitute for those who have had a personal experience of the saving power and love of the Lord Jesus.

That evaluation of the benefits of Christianity which leads to a profitable spiritual employment of the Lord's Day and the setting apart of a portion of every day for family worship is most desirable. Trenchant criticism of the shifting sands of modernism has value, but can never take the place of positive personal religion.

Hence this need for definite spiritual experiences which are given to those who believe, obey, pray and reverently read the Holy Scriptures.
- M.C.Ramsay, Our Banner, September, 1947

INTER CHURCH RELATIONS - Dr. Rowland Ward

I visited the USA in June in line with the decision of Synod. I attended the Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) held at Dort College, Sioux Centre, Iowa from 14-20 June. I immediately felt very much at home meeting old friends and making new ones, many of whom I had known only through internet discussion groups. Without a dissenting voice the Assembly established corresponding relations with the PCEA, thus formalising a happy association we have had for more than half a century. Given the decision of our own Synod in May it is now possible to transmit calls in a regular way between our two denominations, subject to the constitutional requirements of each church. I was able to speak for about 15 minutes about the PCEA.

On Friday 22nd June I reached Pittsburgh, 1000 miles to the east, and enjoyed an excellent meal at the Outback Restaurant in that city. At least this time the writer's Australian accent was recognised, doubtless aided by the impact of Crocodile Dundee, the late Steve Irwin and a certain Simpson's episode. (Yes, Americans do tend to be a bit parochial. One local resident in Sioux Centre asked me if Australia was a democracy, and whether it had a military!)

I preached in two Reformed Presbyterian congregations in Pittsburgh. At North Hills some 150 were present and the singing was excellent. There was an overflow congregation (200 plus) at the evening service at the Geneva Congregation. On Monday I was off to the RPCNA Synod at Geneva College, Beaver Falls, some 50 miles distant. Whereas the OPC Assembly has a quota system that limits numbers to about 150 (there are about 300 OPC congregations and 28000 communicants), the RPs allow a minister and elder from each of there 75 or so congregations (totaling about 4,600 communicants) with extra elders for larger congregations, and so there were over 100 commissioners at the Synod. Here I had observer status, and was able to bring greetings from the PCEA and explain a little of our position, and interact with many brothers during meal times. It was good at this Synod to see Rev Ed Blackwood who is ministering at Frankston-McKinnon in Melbourne for the RPs, and is doing well.

Noteworthy also was the fact that, while it was the older RP ministers who were responsible for changing the old political dissent position of the RP Church, today about 70% of serving ministers come from a non-RP background.

On Friday afternoon I was back in Pittsburgh for the Westminster Conference which this year honoured Dr Wayne Spear, who has retired after teaching at the RP Seminary for 35 years. I had met him first in 1993. Seven of 10 contributors to a book recognising his service were present to deliver their papers. Three were not able to attend - Carl Trueman, R. Scott Clark and Joel Beeke. The ten essays comprise the first book released by P & R Publishing in the new series 'The Westminster Confession and the Reformed Faith' and is titled, /The Faith Once Delivered. /The second volume is slated for next month and is called/ Scripture and Worship /with a section on Scripture in the Westminster Confession of Richard A. Muller and a section on the Westminster Directory for Public Worship by the writer.

Both denominational gatherings were discussing similar issues, including revision of the book of worship to provide a more covenantal focus, and also new psalters. The 1973 RPCNA Psalter was a compromise in language and was always intended to be updated. The OPC are considering publishing a Psalter together with a selection of hymns as they were disappointed that not all the Psalms were included in the second edition of the Trinity hymnbook (1990) published by Great Commission Publications and widely used in the OPC. If this proceeds it will draw extensively from other modern psalters such as that produced by the Free Church of Scotland. Both denominations are growing, albeit the RPs only marginally. The OPC have an extensive Missions interest, while the RPs are focussed on Japan, Cyprus and a new work in South Sudan based on Aweil (which is a Dinka area about 50 miles from the Darfur region).

On my last Lord's Day I preached in two OPC congregations. Then, with a couple of free days until I could get a flight out (on 4th July), I did some research in the RP Seminary in Pittsburgh where I had the use of a guest room. Then home - a 38 hour trip door to door. The net cost to Synod was $2,406. Readers may be interested to know that while I had the privilege of the floor at both meeting I used it only once at the OPC Assembly and then for about 2 minutes. America must be a good influence after all!

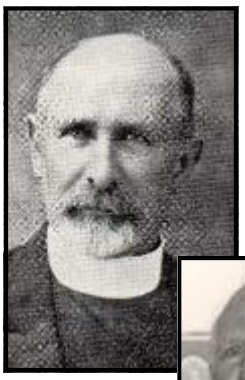
Picture: L to R: Anthony Selvaggio, Richard B. Gaffin, David McKay, Richard C. Gamble, Darryl G. Hart, Wayne R. Spear, C.J.Williams, Rowland S. Ward

ARCHIVAL....

The Ramsay Collection

Some years ago, the Ferguson Memorial Library received a range of original records of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA or "Free Church") on an indefinite loan basis. These records form the basis of a most valuable collection of material for study of the history of the Presbyterian Church in Australia from its earliest origins in the Colonies in the 19th century through the difficult years of the Disruption of 1843 in Scotland and its aftermath, the subsequent union of 1865 and later federations and unions. The Library has considered itself privileged to be the custodian of this material.

Although numerically small with less than 30 congregations Australia-wide in 1994, the Free Church continues down to the present day, maintaining an unswerving commitment to the Lordship of Christ and the absolute authority of the Scriptures in all matters of faith and practice, and constituting the oldest continuing Presbyterian Church in Australia today.



Historians of the Free Church during the 20th century have included Rev. J. Campbell Robinson, Rev. Dr. Rowland Ward, Rev. Herbert William Ramsay and Mr. Gordon Dennes. In addition to his extensive pastoral ministry, Rev. J. Campbell Robinson also edited the Free Church paper over many years, and compiled the definitive history of that Church in 1947. The history of the Free Church was taken up by Dr. Rowland Ward in the wider Presbyterian context in his book "The Bush Still Burns", published in 1989.

The two last mentioned wrote prolifically, often simply under their initials or under pseudonyms, their papers being published in numerous newspapers - especially those covering the northern rivers of NSW, and in various journals. These published articles have provided a wealth of authoritative information for use in church, local, and family history research.

Rev. Herbert W. Ramsay was born at Dingo Creek, Manning River, in 1876, and from early childhood had a great affection for the indigenous people who formed part of his early upbringing. As with many families at this time, the Ramsay family moved further north seeking new opportunities, and settled in the Kempsey area, where the young Herbert commenced work. At a time of great loneliness and in the midst of the great depression and continual floods of the 1890s, Herbert Ramsay first heard the call to the ministry, and also received under God the encouragement to write.

The Kempsey "Argus" had offered a prize of a guinea for the best story by a local writer. A Miss Connors, then in domestic service with Herbert Ramsay's employer Mr. H.E. Palmer, Stock Inspector, drew his attention to the announcement just 24 hours prior to the closing time for the competition, and urged him to enter. Although disinclined to do so, he records that he commenced to write that night, taking his work up to Miss Connors in the kitchen for perusal after her own work was completed. Miss Connors copied the final version, and the young Herbert rowed across the river, depositing his work in the "Argus" box just a few minutes before mid-night. This story secured the prize, and thus began a life¬time of research and writing, alongside a long and fruitful ministry in the Free Church.

The original research records and notes of Gordon Dennes are held substantially, but not entirely, at the Society of Australian Genealogists in Sydney, with some significant material being held in family and local historical societies on the north coast. The Ferguson Memorial Library has in recent years been the recipient of valuable personal papers of Rev. H. W. Ramsay, and of his son Rev. Stewart Ramsay, together with the complete library of a Free Church congregation and other significant items.

In recognition of these gifts, the entire holdings of Free Church material in the Ferguson Memorial Library are now held in a collection known as the Ramsay Collection of Records and Memorabilia of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. The story of its development is a story of God at work through the Joint Archives "Roadshow Project".

A "Roadshow" visit to the Penrith Presbyterian Church in November 2003 included a seminar on the use of church records in family history, and featured Scottish migration to the Hunter and to the Northern Rivers with particular reference to the relevance of the writings of Rev. H.W. Ramsay and Gordon Dennes.

Mr. Alex Neil, an Elder of the PCEA, was present and discussion followed concerning the work of these Free Church historians in recording the history of early settlers in the Clarence River Examiner and other local papers. An ongoing friendship quickly developed between Mr. Neil and the Archivists, and laminated copies of some pages of the original PCEA Minutes held in the Ferguson Library were provided by permission for a celebration of early PCEA work on the Manning River.

Following this celebration, Mr. Neil advised us that a daughter of Rev. Herbert Ramsay was still living, and that she held the personal papers of Mr. Ramsay and his son Stewart, who was also a PCEA minister. Mr. Neil and Mr. Ramsay's daughter subsequently visited the Ferguson Memorial Library, and being satisfied that the Library was an appropriate place to deposit this valuable collection, donated the entire collection of Rev. Herbert and Rev. Stewart Ramsay's diaries and sermons to the Library.

A number of most generous donations have since been received from Rev. Herbert Ramsay's daughter to further develop the "Ramsay Collection" of PCEA material in the Library and to assist our work generally. The gift of the PCEA Library collection referred to above was also

negotiated directly through the good offices of these very special "friends of the Ferguson".

Rev. Herbert Ramsay's daughter herself had a distinguished career in the NSW Department of Education, retiring as Principal of a large Primary School on the northern rivers many years ago. Following on her retirement, she proceeded to undertake two terms as a missionary teacher with the Free Church of Scotland mission in Peru.

In the course of our earlier contacts with Mr. Alex Neil, we were also advised of the existence (at least up until recent years] of the pulpit Bible of the Chalmers Free Presbyterian Church at Clarence Town in the historic Post Office in that Hunter valley town. A note was made to follow this up when making a "Roadshow" visit to Clarence Town Presbyterian Church for their centenary celebrations in early 2005.

During the "open house" display, we noticed one particular visitor taking quite an avid interest in some of the material on display, and engaged him in conversation. To our amazement and delight, this visitor identified himself as the present custodian of the old Chalmers Free Church Bible - the only primary record to have survived the destruction of the Chalmers Church in a fire circa 1921. Following consultation with family members, our visitor most generously donated this valuable Bible, dating from 1873, to the Library as a memento. of the centenary celebrations of the present St. David's Presbyterian Church at Clarence Town. it now forms part of the Ramsay Collection within the Library.

Today, the Archivists of the Presbyterian and Uniting Churches in NSW respectively are privileged to visit Mr. Ramsay's daughter in her home on the north coast whenever travelling in that area, to minister to her in various ways, and to be authorised to act as her literary executors in due course.

"A church (or individual) which is not interested in the past achievements of their forbears for the Gospel of Christ in the land of their nativity, cannot be expected to accomplish anything worthy of remembrance in the future." [Preface to J. Campbell Robinson - "The Free Presbyterian Church of Australia," 1947]
[This article was prepared by members of "The Friends" of the Ferguson Library. The Photographs are those of Rev H.W.Ramsay, and his son, Rev. S.N. Ramsay]

CHURCH LIFE..

Filling our Needs.....

At the close of June 2007 the balances of the main *Working Funds* of the church Synod were:

$ 11,060 Missions (General Funds)
$ 90,147 Missions (DA Anderson Bequest)
$516,634 Missions (Relief Fund – M McSwan Bequest)

$ 13,758 Overdrawn - Missions (TI Leggott Stipend Support)

$ 59,772 Stipend Relief (DA Anderson Bequest)
$ 19,300 Overdrawn - Stipend Relief

$ 91,104 Training of Ministry
$ 10,468 Youth & Fellowship
$ 95,140 Synod General Funds

There were two working accounts overdrawn as at 30/6/07, *Missions - TI Leggott Stipend Support* ($13,758) and *Stipend Relief (*$19,300).

Receipts for Missions, at this stage are not keeping up with payments in *Missions - TI Leggott Stipend Support.* In addition, Synod 2007 approved expenditure totaling $8,700 for 2007 which is yet to be drawn. A funding need therefore exists in this area without drawing on the DA Anderson bequest.

Receipts of $2,050 during 2007 for Stipend Relief have all been from Capital Fund investments. Whilst there is currently sufficient funds in the Anderson Bequest and Synod General Funds to cover the present shortfall, nevertheless, there is an need to assist those congregations who are unable to fully provide for the maintenance of the ministry themselves.

Filling our needs? " A compassionate heart, and an helping hand, will gather by distributing; such giving is getting; such bounty is the most compendious way to plenty." [Thomas Gouge]

EXPRESSION OF SYMPATHY.

We express our heartfelt sympathy to Rhoda and George Ball and Family in the loss of Rhoda's mother in Ireland at the end of June. They were not able to be with her in the final hours, but their daughter and son in law [Lynda and Peter McKelvey] were able to be present at the funeral. George and Rhoda are making a visit to Ireland in September in memory of her.

HELP!

The Rev. Jim Cromarty would like help in locating the following books for research on a possible new book - the life of Susannah Spurgeon. If anyone would loan/ sell these books to Jim, he would be most grateful. Jim may be contacted through e-mail [jim6val@tpg.com.au] or by ordinary mail - 3 Appaloosa Place, Wingham, NSW, 2429, Australia.

Susannah Spurgeon -
"Ten years of my life" and **"Ten years after"** .

A. Binns -
"He the prince, she the princess: the remarkable Susannah Spurgeon".

Thomas Spurgeon -
'The life of Charles Haddon Spurgeon"

A biography by Charles Ray on C.H. Spurgeon. [Jim has the one about his wife]

Plus any works prior to about the 1910 publication. Jim writes: "Most is written about C.H. and little about his wife. I hope someone somewhere can produce the material. Many thanks."

Run For Glory

A TIME FOR ALL THINGS

There is "*a time to be born, and a time to die; time to keep silence, and a time to speak*" [Ecclesiastes 3:1-8] and there is a time to call a spade a spade. In emergencies there is no time for mincing matters, nor for thinking twice before you speak once. Warnings must be given in sharp, pointed, arresting words.

When the lifeboat is alongside, the wavering must be told determinately, "Jump in, or you'll go down with the ship!" When the house is on fire, the shout is loud and clear: "Make haste, and get out as best you can, or you'll be burnt alive!" To a drowning man you throw a rope, and call aloud, "Catch hold of for your life!" And you grasp the arm of the tottering child on the verge of a precipice without ceremony.

Hesitation or indifference is entirely out of the question in such cases. It is a time of urgency. Time would be lost if you were to explain to the shipwrecked mariner all about life-belts, or to the scorching man about fire-escapes, or if you were to teach the drowning youth how he might learn to swim, or the child the law of gravitation; and loss of time would be loss of life.

No! “Sharp!" is the word; the truest kindness is to be plain, decided, abrupt, that those in danger may be warned and rescued.

"'All right," say you. So far, we are at one. Now it is high time that I should button-hole you, my reader. Look you here, then, and tell me, Where are you going? Oft-times friends are reproached for not having given due warning. It shall not be so with you. If no one ever spoke a plain word to you before, you shall have it now.

If you are still unsaved, you are lost!

If you have not been born of God, you are a child of the devil!

If you are not a servant of Christ, you are a slave of sin! If vou are not on the way to Heaven, you are on the road that leads to destruction!

There is no use mincing the matter. It is false charity to say, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace.

The most gracious man that ever trod this earth declared, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

A plain alternative is before you, and you must choose. You must either go on your own way and be lost, or repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance. Hearken to the proclamation:-"Ho! Hither! Come! Believe and live. Disbelieve and die……" It is life or death-pardon or the doom - Christ or Satan -Heaven or hell.

If you turn a deaf ear, so much the worse for you. You can make no terms or conditions. No parley can be held with despisers, no quarter can be given to traitors. Look at that skeleton unearthed at Pompeii. The man had gone

“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.
Are you not much more valuable than they?
Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life.”

[Matthew 6:26-27]

THE SIGHTS I SAW…..

"When I was a boy at school I saw a sight I can never forget - a man tied to a cart, and dragged, before the people's eyes, through the streets of my native town, his back torn and bleeding from the lash. It was a shameful punishment. For many offences? No. For one offence. "Did any of the townsmen offer to divide the lashes with him? No. He who committed the offence bore the penalty all alone. It was the penalty of human law.

"When I was a student at the University, I saw another sight I can never forget - a man brought out to die. His arms were pinioned, his face was already pale as death - thousands of eager eyes were on him as he came from the gaol.

"Did any man ask to die in his room? Did any friend come and loose the rope, and say, "Put it round my neck. I will die instead"? No. He underwent the sentence of the law. For many offences? No. For one offence. He had stolen a money parcel from a stage coach. He broke the law at one point, and died for it.

"I saw another sight - it matters not when - myself a sinner standing on the brink of ruin. deserving naught but hell. For one sin? No. For many, many sins, committed against the unchanging laws of God. But again I looked, and saw Jesus, my substitute, scourged in my stead, and dying on the Cross for me.
I looked, and cried, and was forgiven."

Sir James Y. Simpson, M.D. [the Discoverer of Chloroform].
[Reprinted from "Our Banner", March, 1959]

TO-MORROW……..

He was going to be all that a mortal could be
To-morrow;
No one should be kinder or braver than he,
To-morrow ;
A friend who was troubled and weary he knew,
Would be glad of a lift, and needed it, too;
On him he would call and see what he could do,
To-morrow.
Each morning he stacked up the letters he'd write
To-morrow;
And thought of the folks he would fill with delight
To-morrow ;
It was too bad, indeed, he was busy to-day,
And hadn't a minute to stop on his way; More time I will have to give others, he'd say,
To-morrow.
The greatest of workers this man would have been
To-morrow;
The world would have known him, had he ever seen
To-morrow ;
But the fact is, he died and faded from view, And all that he left here when living was through
Was a mountain of things he intended to do
TO-MORROW.
[From Our Banner, June, 1959]

back for his bag of gold, and been overtaken by the shower of burning ashes.

See that Californian miner, on board the sinking ship, who turned back to his berth for his nuggets, and went down to the bottom, nuggets and all.

Just as surely as destruction overtook Sodom and Gomorrah, so sure is the word, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Severe enough - rather hard, is it? No, for the Bible speaks plainly. Alas, there are many false teachers; heed them not.

Are you inclined to turn? Are you disposed to choose Christ? Are you pricked to the heart? Are you willing to be saved?

In that case, dear friend, there are other plain words for you. Accept, as a free gift, God's offer of Christ. Just as you would hold out your hand and take a gift, so accept Jesus as your Saviour.

God sent Him to save the lost. Jesus died for sinners. Surrender to God, haul down the flag of rebellion. Flee from the wrath to come. There is full forgiveness for the asking. There is welcome for the returning prodigal.

"Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."
- Cheyne Brady.

[Reprinted from "Our Banner", July, 1947]

SEARCH WORK - August, 2007

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

Chapter 4
5. How does John describe the one who sat on the throne in heaven? (2 verses)
6. What did the twenty four elders say when they cast their crowns before the throne?

Chapter 5
7. What was the answer of the elder when John wept because no man was found worthy to open the book [scroll]?
8. What song was sung in heaven when the Lamb had taken the book [scroll]?

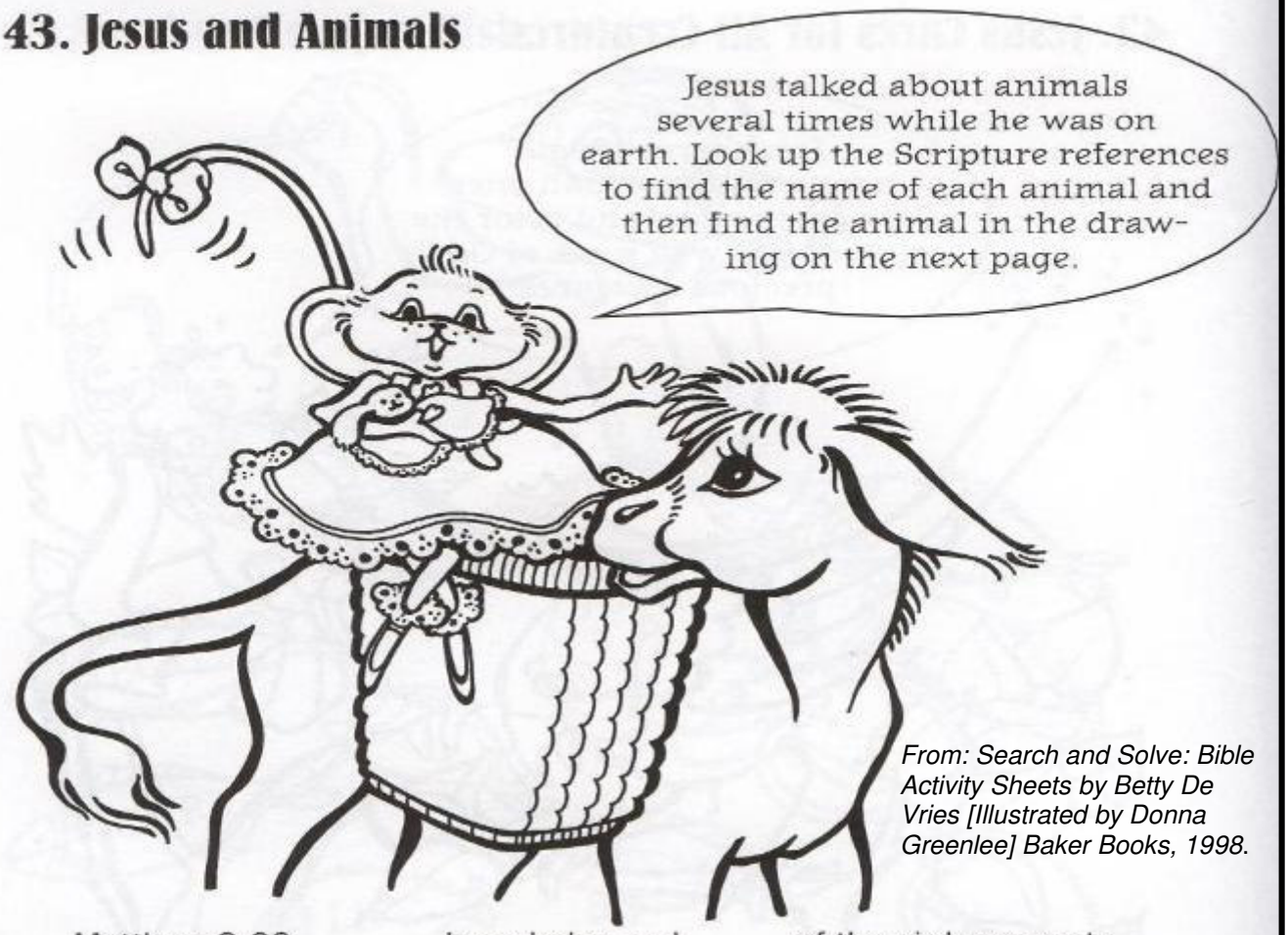
JUNIOR
GENESIS - Chapter 17
1. Why was Abram's name changed to Abraham?
2. What was God's promise to Sarai when her name was changed to Sarah? (2 verses)
3. What was God's answer to Abraham when he prayed that Ishmael might live before him?

Chapter 18:1--15
4. What did the Lord say to Abraham after Sarah had laughed within herself? (2 verses)

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

ACTIVITY PAGE.....

43. Jesus and Animals



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

Matthew 8:20	_____ have holes and _____ of the air have nests.
Matthew 15:26	It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their _____.
Luke 11:12	Or if he asks for an egg, will you give him a _____?
Mark 10:25	It is easier for a _____ to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.
Matthew 12:40	Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge _____.
Luke 22:34	Before the _____ crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.
Matthew 10:16	I am sending you out like _____ among _____. Therefore be as shrewd as _____ and as innocent as _____.

"Rangers in Yellowstone Park tell us that in spite of all the signs that say "Don't feed the bears," people are constantly doing just that. As a result, rangers have to pick up dead bears in the woods that die from starvation because tourists weren't there to feed them. If there are no handouts for 2 weeks, the bears die. And to think that the woods are full of nourishment! The bears could have gotten busy doing what they were built to do, but instead they died because they tried to get by on the easy handouts. We are like those bears. God has provided an abundance of things for us to feed on if we are tracking toward Him through prayer, Bible reading, fellowship with other Christians, and practicing the commands of Scripture. If we are faithful, none of us is going to starve. In fact, our spiritual hunger should drive us to seek out more of the good things of God."
- Joseph M.Stowell [*Experiencing Intimacy with God*, RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan]

WEB WATCH... Peter Carswell

Audio Resources [Part II]

In this second (and much shorter) part we are wrapping up our overview of some of the audio sources available to Christians on the Internet.

A local "Family" radio station broadcasts a number of Christian radio shows and to be able to share these with people is great. (Or listen to them later if I miss it.) How can you do this? Maybe you can download them from the Internet. One radio show I like to listen to is Focus on the Family and while the content of each show might not always be something I agree with, it is good to be able to share those that are.

If you go to http://www.oneplace.com/ you will be able to find a number of audio resources, most of which I have not had a chance to look at let alone listen to. If you click on the link on the side "Podcasts and MP3s", you will see an alphabetic index of audio sources. Finding, as our example, Focus on the Family, you click that link and you will see "Today's" broadcast. You can either play the file or download for free, as long as you register. There are additional downloads, if you follow the "Show Archive" link.

If you choose to "Download" an MP3, don't be too concerned when you are presented with a shopping cart. The download is free. If you are choosing more than one, simply click on the "Continue shopping" link. Once you have finished, click on the "Proceed to checkout" link and fill out the registration details. The registration process can get a bit annoying, as each time you visit you need to fill it out. If you choose to allow the site to remember you, you won't have to type in the details all over again - although you will get another "Thanks for registering" email.

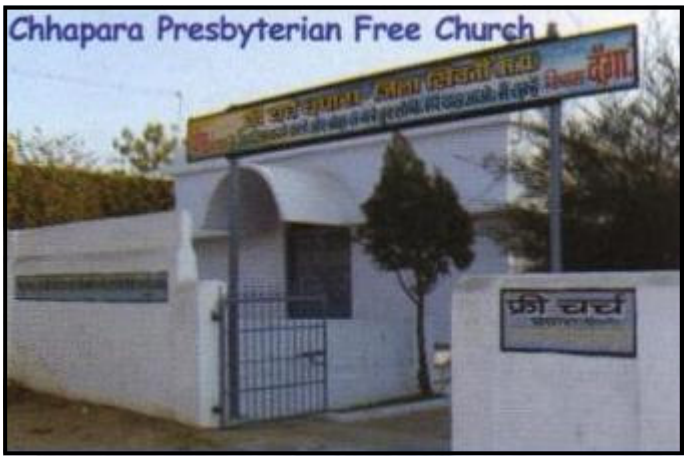
With this in mind I would suggest a couple of security precautions when registering on any site on the Internet.

Don't use your "real" isp-based email account. For a couple of reasons, if you change providers you loose access to that email address. You will eventually get bombarded by spam – no matter what the Privacy Policy says.

Similarly, don't put in the real (full name) and address details. Some people might suggest that this is lying, I don't agree. And I believe protecting your security is much more important. And I would add two things: for what purpose does some company (especially if in another country) need to know where I live (unless they are delivering something). And, while the company you give the information to may be careful with your information and not pass it on knowingly, there have been enough cases of hackers getting personal information to make me reluctant to give any more "true" information than is necessary.

For me, I usually use my real first name, and city (not suburb) and country. One, because I do actually like to be called my real name. Two, chances are they already know this from your computer's Internet Address.

MISSION BRIEFS...



PRESBYTERIAN FREE CHURCH, INDIA: SAME CHURCH; NEW NAME.

Rev David John of the FCCI India writes: "The Free Church of Central India enjoyed sister relationship with churches like you. Thus far we have been functioning under the umbrella of Free Church of Scotland. Since the last five years we have been striving hard to get ourselves registered and become self governing, self propagating, independent church.

On the 6th June, 2007, we have got registered as separate church with Registrar Firms and Societies, Government of Madhya Pradesh, India. We will henceforth be known as Presbyterian Free Church with headquarters Free Church, Premnagar, Jabalpur MP."

DUMISANI FURLOUGH

Norman and Angela Reid arrived in Northern Ireland in mid June for six month's furlough and deputation work. Mrs Reid's mother passed away just after they arrived. We extend our sympathy to them and to the family.

"The Church officers must stir and challenge the believers to be senders and participate themselves in enabling the nations to hear the gospel by giving to the support of others who will thus be their representatives ….. The session should pray, the minister should pray publicly, and all should pray at home for volunteers and greater giving for missions."
- John M.L.Young, Missions, p32.

BOOK REVIEWS ……

JAMES.

"Reading The Bible Today Series, Commentaries" John Dickson. Aquila Press.pbk118pp.

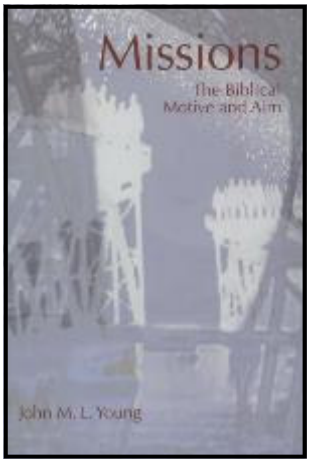
John Dickson is a familiar name to many in the Australian Christian circle. He has written a number of books. The cover of the book may be off putting to some, but the maxim is 'do not judge the book by the cover.' With just 118 pages, you don't expect it to be exhaustive, yet this is a well planned and well written commentary. It uncovers and exposes all the main themes in James with concise and succinct expressions which alert and capture the imagination.

There is a "Reflection" at the end of each section. There are usually three points and they challenge the reader regarding their role and relationship in the present world. There is also a "Question for discussion" to end the section.

This is an excellent commentary for study groups, and Mid Week Bible study. A very useful addition to any Christian bookshelf.
- Sam Tamata

MISSIONS

Missions: The Biblical Motive and Aim - John M.L.Young [Crown and Covenant Publications, Pittsburgh, paper, 176pp. $US 10.]



This is a very good book, and its relevance today reaches far beyond those who plan to go to the mission field, those who are already there, or those who are interested in Missions. It has relevance for the whole Church in this 21st century. With the changes in our culture today, and the modern means of communication, the mission field is no longer "over there" but right next door. This means that the principles and practical comments in this book ought to be studied by every Church as it seeks to fulfill its responsibilities where the Lord has placed it. And to facilitate this, each chapter is followed by a series of questions that would be admirably suited for group study.

The author, the late John M.L Young, is well qualified to write on mission. His parents were missionaries from the Canadian Presbyterian Church, and he, himself, was born on the Korean Mission Field. After theological training at Westminister Theological Seminary, and Faith Theological Seminary, graduating in 1938, he was ordained to the ministry in the Bible Presbyterian Church. Later he served in the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod, and the Presbyterian Church in America. After graduation he was a missionary in Manchuria [1938-1941]; in China [1948] and in Japan [1949-1966] After his wife's death from cancer in 1966 he and his seven children returned to the United States where he became the Professor of Missions in Covenant College until he retired in 1981. He then continued missionary work in Japan under the auspices of the World Presbyterian Missions.

This book was originally given as lectures and published as a series of ten pamphlets while he was working in Japan in the early sixties [1962]. This makes some of the material dated but it's not a drawback because it comes out of a period of post war reconstruction in Japan when many sensitive issues had to be dealt with. But more importantly, because the book is firmly grounded in practical experience informed by the principles of Reformed Theology, its insights are not limited to any culture, or any age. We can all profit immensely from this book because it teaches us how to witness in a multicultural environment.

At the very start Dr. Young gives a "Kingdom" focus to missions by putting missions in the context of the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer and our Lord's High Priestly prayer. He then goes on to talk about the Presuppositions of Missions - "the condition of man as lost, and the power of Christ to save." He deals thoroughly with the "point of contact" in mission, whether it's the stone age savages in the jungles of New Guinea, or "atheistic communists in the Universities of Japan". That point of contact is man made in the image of God. Because of that, we can talk, witness and reason with those to whom we go - and he deals thoroughly [chapters 4 and 5] with this issue, relating it to specific examples from his own experience. He deals also with the problem of "Identification' and 'Accommodation' [very important issues today] and the many practical problems in developing self - governing, self - propagating, and self - supporting churches.

By far the longest chapter in the whole book is that on Church - State relations [Church, State, and Missions] - some 28 pages, compared with an average of 15. One of the study questions in this chapter - "What is the scriptural relationship of the Church to the State" - could keep a study group going for a long time, especially in the light of the American revision of the Confession of Faith [Dr. Young quotes both versions, p 88, without going into much detail]. However, his concern is more practical - participating in non Christian State religious ceremonies. He is certainly right when he rejects appeasement on this issue [p 96].

The book is not without its lighter moments. He recounts the experience of one convert. He said a friend invited him, by way of spending a Sunday afternoon, to come to hear a "pretty woman sing, and a tall big man with a long beard shout and howl upon an elevated place, flinging his arms and twisting his body in all fantastic manners, to all which admittance is entirely free…" [p122]. Nor is it without its lengthy definition about what Mission is, and I think there must be a mistake on page 122 [1919]. But all in all, its an excellent preparatory manual for mission full of good theology, practical comment and well worth studying carefully by every Christian today. And no one can gainsay Dr. Young's closing words: "God's work, done by God's men in God's way, will have God's support." [p150]
-Ray Murray.

ANNIE JOHNSTON DUNLOP
1918-2007 - A Tribute

She grew up in a missionary environment at home where her mother read missionary stories to her children, sent them to missionary meetings, and publicly expressed her willingness for them to become missionaries. Mary Slessor of Calabar became Nan's heroine and by her midteens she knew she would serve the Lord abroad.

The Preparatory Years

Central to Nan Dunlop's life was her 30 years of missionary service in the heart of India. And God prepared her for it from her youth. She was just nine years old when the Irish Evangelical Church came into being in 1927 and she became one of the first generation Sunday School children in the Botanic Avenue congregation. She came to the Saviour when she was 12 when one of the Church's Ministers preached on John 6:37: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out". So she was one of the first generation converts too.

She battled with the problem of indwelling sin in the believer during her teens but God used it to give her an assurance that she never lost. She came into membership when she was 18.

She qualified as a Nurse in 1940 and as a Midwife in 1942 and then worked as an industrial nurse in a wartime munitions factory. As the Lord prepared her for India he never let her put down roots at home.

As her missionary calling developed she came to appreciate the advice of her Minister Rev W J Grier. It was he who guided her into medical training and later into the Free Church of Scotland Missions. South America had become the focus of Nan's thinking and she was taken aback when the Foreign Missions Board invited her to serve in India, but after prayer she consented.

So God used the family and the church to prepare her. Listening to the Word from the pulpit and preparing papers for the Youth Fellowship were of particular value.

The India Years

Nan sailed for India in a wartime convoy in December 1944, when she was 26. She served five full terms and one shorter, final term.

She became the first nurse at Lakhnadon Christian Hospital which opened in 1936 but after a year moved 17 miles south to Chhapara, which became the hub of her missionary service. She worked as a general nurse but many of her stories focus on her ' midwifery, much of it in outlying villages. In the 1960's she was also Manager of Chhapara Christian School, which today has over 800 students.

But Nan is remembered in India first for her love for evangelism in which her fluency in the Hindi language made her so effective. Then as mother to the orphan children in the Mission's care through which she became known as Mamaji (respected mother).

Nan was not a strategist -"I did what was in front of me!" She was humble and supportive-always in the role of a helper. With her colleagues she coped with climate extremes like oppressive heat and monsoons. They faced dangers and shared sickness together. Nan was once critically ill with snakebite, and it was health problems that drew her service to a close in 1974.

The Retirement Years

Nan's 33 `retirement' years were the longest phase of her life and it was during this period that most today will have known her. But they were not inactive years! For 10 of them she was Matron and Deputy Matron of two Belfast Boarding Schools. One of the Headmasters spoke of her `ministry' - "to many you were a real mother when they were far from home". Nan undertook five more visits to India-for a wedding, to open an extension to Lakhnadon Christian Hospital, to cut the sod for the new Chhapara Church, for the opening of the new Church, and an extension to the school.

She was a faithful church member, involved to the maximum that health would permit. She was a gracious, spontaneous, generous Christian lady, always expressing her love for children. It was a joy to have fellowship with her. And she never ceased her vigilance for new opportunities to present the Gospel or provide Christian literature.

Her heart remained in India - with correspondence, telephone calls, and her thirst for news. The Churches at Lakhnadon and Chhapara sent tributes to her Service of Thanksgiving.

There are encouragements in the work in India today that Nan did not see. One sows, another waters, but God gives the increase.

We extend our sincere sympathy to her brother Lawrence, sister Jeannie, and to all within the family circle who showed such closeness and devotion. It meant so much to Nan. They will all miss her to be sure, but their joy that she is now "present with the Lord" will be paramount.

[We are indebted to "The Evangelical Presbyterian" [July/August issue] - the magazine of the Irish Evangelical Presbyterian Church - for this report.]

The Beauty of Baptism

Rowland S. Ward

Most ministers will be familiar with applicants for baptism for their child who think that baptism it is essential for salvation or that it actually coveys the grace of which it speaks. This view had been common before the Reformation and continued very much the emphasis of the Church of Rome. But it is also true that baptism is frequently neglected nowadays and a position taken up that in effect says that the child can decide for itself when he or she is old enough. This essentially Baptist approach was also in view when the Westminster Divines were meeting, as the new and small Baptist movement was very vocal in the 1640s and its ideas were spreading.

The Divines wrote in their first completed production, the *Directory for the Public Worship of God,* that 'outward baptism is not so necessary that, through the want thereof, the infant is in danger of damnation or the parents guilty, if they do not contemn (despise) or neglect the ordinance of Christ when and where it may be had.' Two years later they wrote in their *Confession of Faith* (28:5) 'Although it is a great sin to contemn [despise] or neglect this ordinance [of baptism] yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptised are undoubtedly regenerated.'

It is likely that most Australian Presbyterians accept that baptism is not essential to salvation, but it is less clear that all are convinced that it is a great sin to neglect it. We need to explore what our fathers in the faith understood to be the nature and effect of baptism to understand what is involved.

What is a Christian?

A Christian is essentially a disciple or follower of Jesus, but we don't make ourselves disciples. If people are commonly said to *fall* in love – an expression suggesting that they couldn't help it, there is a sense in which this is true of Christians too. Christians are chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world. The Lord opens their hearts to receive the truth (Acts 16:14). We indeed respond to God's grace, but it is God who both takes the initiative and enables us to respond by a saving faith. Such a faith unites us to Christ, and brings us into the fellowship of Christ's people, the church, so that we are light to the world (Matthew 5:14). We are called to be God's special people to proclaim the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9).

The previous paragraph highlights three things often neglected or misunderstood: (1) the wonder of God's gracious election – his choice before our choice; (2) the vital reality of union with Christ; (3) the importance of the church.

Baptism the norm for disciples

The New Testament does not envisage a person being a disciple without being baptised. It's the normal and expected thing. Whether old or young, male or female, at night in a prison or travelling through the wilderness, baptism of those who profess faith is the rule, and is easily administered, even by one who had been beaten and imprisoned (Acts 16:22). It is not John's baptism but Christian baptism (Acts 19:4-5), yet the two are linked in some ways, for Jesus was baptised by John.

John said Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matthew 3.11). In the context this means the fire of judgment. John doesn't understand the full significance of what he says. Thinking perhaps of water baptism as a sign of cleansing, he was not comfortable baptising Jesus, but Jesus said, 'Permit it now; it is proper to do this to fulfil all righteousness' (Matt 3:15). Whatever else this means, it surely includes reference to Jesus self-identification with sinners which ultimately leads to the Cross where Jesus is judged in their place.

Jesus himself says: "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it was already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how under pressure I am until it is accomplished!' (Luke 12:49-50). He desires the fire to be poured out that will result in division among people (Luke 12:51ff), but he must undergo the baptism of his death for that to occur. Linking in with Matthew 3:11, it would seem that the primary reference is to the fire of judgment – a judgement that brings salvation through the Spirit, but also a judgment which brings condemnation to those who do not believe.

> ***"The baptism of the infant children in particular reminds us of the grace of God, his choice before ours, his promise to be our God and the God of our children. They are baptised not to make them children of the covenant but because they are already children of God's covenant."***

If water baptism in some way points to the Cross we can understand how important it is. If you reject it you are in a sense rejecting Christ's death for sinners. In the same way the Old Testament rite of circumcision was seen as encapsulating God's covenant, and those who refused the visible sign were to be cut off from the people in judgment (Genesis 17:10,14 cf. Exodus 4:24ff).

Circumcision and baptism

The link between circumcision and baptism is not simply a matter of inference. Paul, in rejecting the necessity of physical circumcision, says that believers were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands through the putting off of the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ (Colossians 2:11-12). There are two possible meanings to these verses.

Most likely Paul is saying that the death of Jesus (the putting off the body of the flesh, cf. Colossians 1:22) was the circumcision of Christ, with the implied token physical cutting which anticipated it now superseded, since by virtue of union with Christ they have been buried and raised with him to new life. Or we may take 'the body of

flesh' to refer to the believer's sinful nature (as in NIV), in which case the circumcision God has accomplished in Christ (the inward removal of sin) is symbolised by baptism which renders physical circumcision obsolete. In other words, Christ's death is the basis of the true circumcision of the believer, and our participation in Christ has baptism as its visible sign.

We can conclude from the foregoing that circumcision and baptism are linked in that both point to Christ, and both include the idea of symbolically removing that which defiles. Further, in the earlier time circumcision was the sign and seal of God's covenant, while in the new covenant baptism has that function.

Children

This leads us to the view that without a specific repeal in the New Testament the place of children in the covenant is secure, and this is confirmed by the references to the baptism of households (Acts 16:15; 34). True, only male Israelites were circumcised but the whole nation was considered to be the covenant people of God. Infants were circumcised at eight days when they knew nothing of what was happening. But how well this reminds us that the Gospel is first and foremost about what God has done and does, not what we have done or do!

The family is good, but sin has entered and defiled all relationships. Yet God's grace acts against sin, not against the family. Those who belong to Christ are Abraham's spiritual children and heirs of the promise God gave him (Galatians 3:29). At its most fundamental the promise is: 'I will be your God and the God of your children after you' (Genesis 17:7). There is nothing more wonderful than this in the new covenant; rather the profound implications of God's commitment to his people is revealed in the person and deeds of the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us.

The Meaning of the word

When we look at the meaning of the Greek word for baptism as used in New Testament times it does not refer to an action which requires submersion in water. Nor should we be content to describe the idea of baptism simply as washing or purification. Originally, *baptizo* (I baptise) was an intensive form of the word *bapto*, to dip, and thus originally meant an effective dipping and then dyeing, since materials were immersed in the dye. But soon the focus moves from the dipping/immersion to the change wrought by the action.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament circa 200 BC, the Septuagint, there are only two uses of *baptizo* despite a number of places where total immersion is in view. In Isaiah 21:4 it is used for the horror that overwhelmed the prophet when he saw the vision of Babylon's fall; in 2 Kings 5:14 it describes Naaman's dipping himself seven times in the Jordan and experiencing cleansing from his leprosy. The common idea in these two cases is not immersion but the transforming effect of the experience.

In short, *baptizo* can refer to a literal or metaphorical washing that brings about a new state of affairs. Thus classical Greek writers use it for a sunken ship which lies on the bottom of the sea instead of sailing proudly over it, or for those baptised with wine so as to be in a drunken state, or for those overwhelmed by debt. In religious contexts it embraces ritual washings designed to remove disqualification in God's sight.

There is no Old Testament precedent which provides a satisfactory basis for a immersion baptism, as almost all were sprinklings or of a self-administered general nature.

Given the root idea of a literal or metaphorical washing which brings about a new state of affairs, we can more deeply appreciate Jesus' reference to his death as a baptism. It is an experience which is absolutely transforming, marks Jesus' transition from the state of humiliation to the state of exaltation, ratifies the new covenant and secures life for all believers.

Our water baptism does not involve the spilling of blood as did circumcision. The blood that truly circumcises the heart has been shed by Jesus. It is through the effective work of God's Holy Spirit that we are brought into a faith-union with Christ, and the sprinkling of clean water is a suitable method of baptism with Biblical warrant (cf Ezek 36:25-27). The likely early mode was by sprinkling or pouring while standing in shallow water.

It is vital to recognise that becoming a Christian means union with Christ. If we are baptised we are baptised into *his* death (Romans 6:3). The meaning of baptism is the key thing, and attempts to illustrate death, burial and resurrection by the mode of baptism inevitably fail.

Church and family

Our brief review challenges us with the implications of baptism. The baptism of the infant children in particular reminds us of the grace of God, his choice before ours, his promise to be our God and the God of our children. They are baptised not to make them children of the covenant but because they are already children of God's covenant. Baptism is not an empty sign nor does it automatically convey grace; rather, it confirms and seals what is already true in the promise of God. If you believe his promise you will not neglect its sign and seal.

It follows that the responsibilities baptism put upon us are to be fulfilled within the fellowship of believers. Calvin, favourably quoting one of the early church fathers, states, 'He who does not have the Church as his Mother cannot have God as his Father.' God has created a new community and neglecting it is a recipe for trouble.

But the nurture of the children in spiritual things is also a parental responsibility. In the careful, prayerful, regular use of the ordinary means one may expect to see the children grow up to love and serve the Lord. It is possible for there to be an excessive emphasis upon felt religious experience, and spasmodic evangelistic efforts, as if there must be a dateable crisis conversion. More normal perhaps is growing up without ever not knowing the love of the One who loved us before we loved him.

[This article also appears in the July issue of the Australian Presbyterian Life]

MORE CHURCH NEWS ....

Armidale Car Rally

Bristling winds and bursts of freezing sleet marked the Armidale PCEA 2007 car rally on the 23rd June. Some (Hmm! How do you define wisdom?) decided not to embark on such a cold calculated quest. However, the brave battalion bustled together at the starting point to have their car odometers read, be issued with pages of clever clues and then waited for a start time.

The flag fell at 10:55am with a maroon station wagon heading completely in the wrong direction. Much was learnt as cars crossed at odd angles around Neville's corner and past the picket fences in the City of Armidale. Armidilian local knowledge aided some in discovering who the famous grazier was who attended the now defunct Dumeresq primary school.

After many turns and twists, slippery dips, encounters with dinosaurs and Winnie the Pooh, the motely crews with their disillusioned drivers switched their engines off! The thermos' rolled out quickly and sausages were soon sizzling.

The adjudicators assessed the answers at length, but there could be only one winner. Grant Dawson's family took home the highly prized hubcap! Much fun was had and warm fellowship on a day where the temperature was a mild 5 degrees at midday. Thanks go to the mastermind - McKinnon's!

Triumph: Claiming the Prize!

New Addition

Congratulations go to Brad and Pam Dawson on the safe arrival of a precious gift from God. Chloe Grace was added to the family on Wednesday evening the 6th June 2007. Both mum and baby are doing well.

Supply In Taree.

The Rev. George Ball will be giving supply to the Manning River Congregation on the 5th and 12th August.

Communion in the Northern Rivers

Dr. Wes Hanna was the Visiting Minister at the July Communion on the Northern Rivers. At the Communion Service he spoke on Acts 2:22-24. He called on us to Meet the Man, See the Plan, and introduced us to The Risen Man. At the Thanksgiving Service he spoke on Acts 2:42-47- The Living and Loving Church.

OPPORTUNITY FOR SERVICE ....

Christian Aboriginal Parent-Directed School

[CAPS] Kurrawang

The CAPS Board is seeking qualified Christian teachers who are eligible for WACOT registration for the following positions starting ASAP / Term 3, 2007 [The positions are still unfilled]

Primary Teachers

Two positions are currently available.

CAPS Kurrawang is an Independent Primary school with approximately 40 Indigenous students from Kindergarten to Year 7. It is located in Kurrawang Aboriginal Christian Community, 18km west of Kalgoorlie, WA. Kurrawang is a quiet and well-run community in a picturesque setting. Housing within the community is available for staff and all services are conveniently accessed in nearby Kalgoorlie.

For an application package contact:

Luse Tamata - PH: (08) 9091 2590 FX: (08) 9021 8781
Email: kurracap@bigpond.com

We apologise for mistakes in the July printed copy [not the pdf file]. One was in the Blog about the "Kingdom Conference": Romans 14:7 should have been Romans 14:17. The other was in the Blog on "The Story of Two Brothers." In the 7th paragraph, "do not" was left out. Peter Hitchins said: "We do not take the Bible literally."

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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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