

A photograph of a sunset over a lake. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and purple. Silhouetted trees are visible in the foreground and background. A large tree trunk is prominent on the right side of the frame.

the presbyterian banner

February 2010

*Your sun will never set again,
and your moon will wane no more;
the LORD will be your everlasting light,
and your days of sorrow will end.*

Isaiah 60:20

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Subscriptions

11 Issues per year
Within Australia: \$25 [Bulk \$20]
Overseas : AU \$40 Airmail.

Direct Credit

Westpac 032-587 75 0105

Editorial

As I was tidying up various piles of Christian magazines going back a few years, I noticed a review for a movie, which was at that time the latest blockbuster. I'm sure you would find the words for that review similar to the way they review so many of the blockbuster movies. It went something like this, "As people remember the day John F. Kennedy was shot in Dallas, so they will remember where they were the day this movie opened to record audiences and reaped world-record sales."

The movie reviewed there has become a mere blip in the world of entertainment. But it does place so much of what this world worships in a strictly passing light. For what is a life worth when it is reduced to waiting through a cold night outside theatres or Box Offices to get tickets to a first screening? What an indictment on this world when its headline news is reduced to this? Because Hollywood will always have another thriller around the corner, and the next one will surely outdo whatever has come before it in special effects and the like. This is all simply escapism - it doesn't really help anyone - either now or in the future!

Christians are not immune from this either. The latest best-selling Christian books are right there - in a Christian bookstore near you. And if the shop is not near you you'll read all about it in their fancy brochures and through the Christian media. Read the superlatives - it's all so awesome, exciting, and gripping. You can't miss it!

Many churches have taken up this secular style into their Sunday services and other activities. The pressure is on. The range of phenomena shown in Christian circles over recent years is too numerous to name. There has been an emphasis on the spectacular, and certainly it has to be entertaining. Anything remotely connected with past practices is branded with the most terrible negativity. "I was in a traditional church the other day," one of these neo-evangelists was saying, "and a man died in the pew. The ambulance crews had to clear five rows before they got to him!"

Of course, he would never set foot in a 'traditional' church. They wouldn't pay him the six-figure retainer in the first place, and then he wouldn't want to hear anything that could give him the wrong vibes.

It is the traditional church, however, that will keep to the One who is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever (Heb.13:8)." The lesson of church history quite clearly shows that when the church becomes wrapped up in itself it has effectively compromised with the world. The latest figures equating the divorce figures in secular America with those among confessing born-again believers tells that clear enough.

Sometimes it can be hard to gear up for another year of doing much the same. But, just think, it is our regular and committed service for the Lord that He blesses. While other Christians can stun us with their amazing testimonies and experiences, and what seems to be such an incredible walk with the Lord, that's not what the Lord asks of us. Just as a marriage needs to be kept up by the commitment of each spouse, so we have to constantly focused - regardless of our feelings - upon the Great Lover of our souls.

May we all be encouraged to keep on going the Lord's way. And may this humble magazine be a help to you on that way.

"It is not the possession of extraordinary gifts that makes extraordinary usefulness, but the dedication of what we have to the service of God."

F.W. Robertson

Cover Photo: *Sunset over Lake Sambell, Beechworth, Victoria*

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. Submission by email is preferred.

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This magazine is available as a pdf file on the Church Website: www.pcea.org.au

An Introduction to the New Editor

Sjirk Bajema

Allow me to introduce myself to the readership of *The Presbyterian Banner*. As I have been helped by getting to know a number of you already, so, in this way, you can get to know myself and my family better, and so that I can also invite you to be part of the ongoing ministry of *The Presbyterian Banner*.

My background

I was born in Nelson, New Zealand, although I have a quite un-Kiwi-like name. That was because my parents were migrants from the province of Friesland in the Netherlands, from where they joined many other thousands in the 1950's Dutch migration to the different parts of the British Commonwealth – Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Having been raised in a conservative Reformed background in the Netherlands, they joined the Reformed Church in Nelson.

This is where I grew up and, after doing a Bachelor of Arts majoring in History in New Zealand, I completed the Bachelor of Divinity at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong in the early 1980's, where I also did an Honours degree in History at Deakin University. This was where I met and married Betty-Ann Knol, which is also a Frisian name. Betty-Ann comes from a similar Christian background, for which we are most thankful to the Lord for. Geelong was also where our daughter, Eileen, was born. From there I did a one-year internship in

the Reformed Church of Perth, after which I served for twelve years at the Reformed Church of Canning in south-eastern Perth (now the Gosnells CRCA). This was where our son, Andrew, was born. At the beginning of 1999 I commenced a ten-year ministry at the Reformed Church of Mangere in Auckland, New Zealand. The next part is known to you as a reader of *The Presbyterian Banner*, for in January last year I was inducted into the ministry at Narre Warren.

Over the years of ministry I have also been involved in editing several magazines. In Western Australia we were involved with *THE CALL* magazine, which

was a call to hold fast to the confessions and to do that to God's glory. I was the General Editor for six years. And while in New Zealand I was able to serve for eight years as the editor of the denominational magazine, *Faith in Focus*.

Magazine ministry is therefore not unknown to me. It is something I have enjoyed, bringing me into the wider world of Christian publications and media, and also as a good use of the gifts the Lord has given me.

Our future

But enough of me! Now, I want to lay before you your participation in this ministry.

Because each one of you has a part to play. Of course there is the prayerful involvement I would trust is there for all the different aspects of our church life. But there might be more. If you are a minister or elder or keen writer you could be involved in providing suitable article, reviews and other submissions, such as local church news. Perhaps your good quality digital photos could be used as artwork somewhere in the magazine?

You will notice a revamping of several sections. While they might look new it is simply a fresher format – and it comes with a fresh face! I am also looking towards more local input

from our churches so that we can be aware of what is happening amongst us and so be more prayerfully and actively involved.



Sjirk and Betty-Ann at the Byron Bay Lighthouse, November 2009

Synod Treasury

From a report submitted by the Synod Treasurer (Mr A.H.Steel), too late to be included in full in this issue, it appears the Synod's financial needs have been met so far but the Stipend Relief Fund is exhausted and monies for this need will have to come from the General Fund. General Fund itself is down from \$86,000 at 31/12/08 to \$61,000 at 31/12/08. As the annual need is currently about \$65,000 for Stipend Relief for Narre Warren, Sydney West and Armidale, and \$30,000 for the support of Trevor Leggott's role with AIM, as well as general costs, it will be seen that we will not be able to meet the needs without increased giving. Your prayerful and financial support is therefore sought to assist in filling this present need.

"Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days." Eccles.11:1

By bread, is here meant all things necessary for the support of men's lives. And by casting their bread upon the waters is meant their giving freely of that which they have for God's cause in the earth ..." **Thomas Gouge**

The Past for Today

The Church and Her Theology

Rowland S. Ward

I was thinking the other day about the great treasure we have in the Reformation Confessions and Catechisms, and I also reflected on the long history of thinking through biblical teaching that is behind them. In subsequent articles we will meet some of the movers and shakers of the church that have shaped her thinking, so perhaps a bit of an overview of how Christian theology developed would be useful.

Don't be put off by the word 'theology'. Literally it means the science concerning God. Now God has revealed something of his invisible perfections to every human so that they are clearly seen and understood, hence each individual's religious behaviour, or lack of it, is inexcusable. A further implication of this general revelation, as we call it, is that in a sense everyone is a theologian, everyone has thoughts about God. The real question is whether our thinking about God is controlled by God's revelation of himself or by ideas from other sources. Given our sin, general revelation is both distorted by us - to false religion and even to the point of professed atheism - and inadequate. God's special revelation in Holy Scripture is therefore absolutely necessary.

The Bible contains theology that is the norm, but of course the church didn't always grasp the implications of everything at once. Often it is controversy that God uses to clarify issues and build up his people. Our theology to be adequate must be a believing response, but it is always a human response and thus does not possess the inerrant character that belongs to God's words. It is always subject to review and correction in the light of better understanding of what God has said. It is not bare rationalism although it involves the reason. B.B. Warfield well expressed it when he said:

'...that the truths concerning divine things may be so comprehended that they may unite with a true system of

divine truth, they must be: first, revealed in an authoritative word; second, experienced in a holy heart; and third, formulated by a sanctified intellect. Only as these three unite, then, can we have a true theology.' (1)

Back in 1623 'the learned doctor' William Ames of Franeker spoke in similar vein when he wrote *'Theology is the doctrine or teaching of living to*



A portrait of Augustine of Hippo by Philippe de Champaigne, 17th Century

God.' As far as students for the ministry were concerned it was the task of the university to

'call theology away from questions and controversies, obscure, confused, and not very essential, and introduce it to life and practice so that students would begin to think seriously of conscience and its concerns.' (2)

Some history

Systematic theology does not really exist in a recognisable form in the

early centuries. Augustine's *Enchiridion* (ca. AD 421) provides a reflection on the Christian Faith under the headings of Faith, Hope and Love. Isidore of Seville (c.560-636) wrote his *Three Books of Sentences* (opinions) drawing particularly from Augustine and Gregory the Great (540-604). John of Damascus (676-749) wrote his *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* in the 8th century. With the extension of universities in Europe, the 12th century saw the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (c.1100-1160). This was written about AD 1150 as a compilation of propositions from earlier sources, and soon attained normative status, so that any aspiring master wrote a commentary on it. The *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) was more elaborate, survived the condemnations of Aristotle in 1277, but was usurped by Duns Scotus and his school except among the Dominicans who continued to study his commentary on Lombard. Cardinal Cajetan (1469-1534) started the trend of writing commentaries on the *Summa* itself (1507/22). Thomas was made a Doctor of the Church in 1567. The *Summa* subsequently was influential in Roman Catholic thought, experiencing a resurgence in the 20th century.

However, the Reformers did not seek to overthrow all past Christian thought, but to reform and recast it in those areas they regarded as having moved from Scripture lines. Philip Melancthon wrote his influential *Loci Communes* (Common Places/Topics) in 1521 drawn chiefly from the Epistle to the Romans: it was the first systematic treatment of the Protestant faith but limited largely to the issues of salvation then disputed.

In the mediaeval church instruction in the faith had been largely in terms of memorisation of the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Com-

mandments. Small manuals of instruction, many in explicit question and answer form, appeared among the Reformers. They often utilised these elements but provided detailed explanation as well. Notable are Luther's *Small Catechism* (1529), Calvin's *Catechism of the Church at Geneva* (1545), and the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), all of which used the question and answer format. Larger Confessions of Faith also appeared. The Roman church countered with similar productions, particularly the Jesuit Peter Canisius' *Summa doctrina* (1556), a catechism which was widely translated and used for the next two hundred years. The *Catechism of the Council of Trent* (1566) was a reference text for use by priests, and that Council also defined the doctrine of the Roman

church on disputed matters.

Volumes on common topics were soon superseded by larger more fully developed systematic treatments of the faith. Calvin produced the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in 1536, the title implying instruction or education in Christianity was the aim. It was significant in stabilising the Reformation movement, but numerous others works were produced by Reformed scholars over the next 150 years. A very serviceable theology is that by Francis Turretin of Geneva issued in 1673 and republished a few years ago in English translation by P & R Publishing. There have been many since, probably the best being Herman Bavinck's great 4 volume *Reformed Dogmatics*, also now in English.

Well, most readers may not delve into these large volumes, but don't forget the great treasure we have in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. They are not dry as dust books but devotional manuals of the highest order.

(1) John E. Meeter (ed.), *Selected Short Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield – II* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1973) 671.

(2) William Ames, *An Exhortation to the Students of Theology* (trans. Douglas Horton & privately printed 1958) 1.

Prescribed Search & Youth Work

Search Work—January 2010

SENIOR (12 YEARS and over) and INTERMEDIATE (10 & 11 years)

Intermediate omit questions 7 and 8

The Gospel according to MATTHEW, chapter 1.

1. Jesus Christ is the son of which two famous men of the Old Testament?
2. The generations from Abraham to Christ are divided into three sections. How many generations are in each section?
3. What did the angel of the Lord say to Joseph in a dream? (2 verses)
4. Find the verse in Isaiah 7 which was fulfilled by the birth of Christ.

Chapter 2

5. Write out the verse in Micah 5 which prophesied where Christ should be born.
6. What gifts did the wise men give the young child?
7. Write out the verse in Hosea 11 fulfilled by the flight into Egypt.
8. What verse in Jer. 31 was fulfilled by Herod's killing the children of Beth-lehem?

JUNIOR (9 years and under)

MATTHEW 1:18--25

1. Why was Mary's son to be called "Jesus"?

Chapter 2

2. What was the answer of the chief priests and scribes when Herod asked them where Christ should be born?
3. What gifts did the wise men give the young child?
4. Where did Joseph take his family to live when he returned from Egypt?

Search Work—February 2010

SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE

Intermediate omit questions 4 and 8

MATTHEW chapter 3

1. Which verse in Isaiah 40 refers to John the Baptist's preaching?
2. According to John, how would his baptism differ from Christ's? (2 verses)
3. What did the voice from heaven say?

Chapter 4

4. What were the three acts the devil asked Jesus to do in each of the three temptations? (3 separate verses) Find the three verses in Deut. chs 8 and 6 that Jesus used in answer to the temptations. (Quote chapter and verse only)
5. Write out the verses in Isaiah 9 which were fulfilled when Jesus went to live in Capernaum.
6. What were the names of the two sets of brothers called by Jesus as he walked by the sea of Galilee? (2 separate verses)
7. Write out the 2 separate verses that describe the responses of each to the call.
8. What kind of people were brought to Jesus to be healed?

JUNIOR

MATTHEW 3

1. John the Baptist baptised with water, but what was the one coming after him to do? (2 verses)
2. What happened when Jesus came up from the water at his baptism?

Youth Work—2010

Metrical Psalms

Infants (< 7 yrs)

Junior (8-12 yrs)

Senior (13-17 yrs)

1st Certificate

Psalm 23/121

Psalm 122

Psalm 139: 1-10

2nd Certificate

Psalm 67/100

Psalm 1

Psalm 143 (2nd Ver.): 6-8

Books of the Bible

Correct repetition of the Books of the Bible in order.

Essays

Infants (<7)

Q. Illustrate Noah's ark, animals and a rainbow and explain what the rainbow means (Genesis 9: 13-17).

Junior (8-12) (up to 400 words)

Q. Select an Old Testament Bible character and describe their life and relationship with God. You may wish to include an illustration.

Senior (13-17) (1000 words)

Q. Explain what is meant by 'Seek the kingdom of God' (Luke 12:22-34) and describe what this passage is teaching and how it applies to us.

Please send your completed essays to:
Convener, Youth & Fellowship Committee,
74 Reservoir Place, Wauchope NSW 2446

Birthday Cards

Margaret Kinder has noted that a number of the cards are coming back because of a change of address. Could Minister / Session Clerks and any other involved in this please let Margaret know, as soon as possible, of any change. This also helps to reduce the cost of postage.

Her address is: Margaret Kinder
 46 Kent Gardens, Soldiers' Pt.
 NSW 2317.

Scripture Memory

1st certificate (Junior) Proverbs 3: 5-12

2nd certificate (Senior) Romans 5: 1-11

The Ten Commandments

Exodus 20: 1-17

Psalm Tunes

Please choose appropriate Psalm from preferred book

(sol fa copies available from convener)

Junior

Duke Street

Retreat

Sheffield

St. Andrew

Senior

Leuchars

Farningham

Felix

Before the Throne

Catechism

Section 1 1-10

Section 2 11-22

Section 3 23-38

Section 4 39-62

Section 5 63-68

Section 6 89-107

Section 7 1-107 word perfect

Mission in the Banner

Mission Work Among the Aborigines of N.S.W.

Our Banner October 15, 1935

Trevor Leggott reports: The article below was forwarded to me by Stewart Upton. It was written by Peter Mathieson, a missionary from Purfleet NSW, and originally appeared in our church magazine "Our Banner" in October 1935. Peter Mathieson's comments are worthy of prayerful reflection, and remain sadly poignant, considering the present circumstances and the ongoing need to support Gospel ministry amongst the Aboriginal people of Australia.

By Peter C. Mathieson

To begin at the beginning, I must tell of the call to this work about which I have been asked to write. After definite training for mission work, I was seeking guidance regarding a field of service, and after prayerfully considering different foreign fields, was reminded of the spiritual needs of the Aborigines of Australia. It was through reading Proverbs 3:27 at this time that I was definitely called to this work. (*Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act.*) I was brought up on land that originally belonged to these people, and during my training for missionary work was supported chiefly from the same source, and expected a good deal of help from there, wherever I should go in the Lord's work. Considering these facts in the light of the text mentioned, I realised that to neglect the spiritual needs of the Aborigines is to withhold good from those whom it is due, while it is in the power of our

hands to do it.

When starting work amongst these people, I must confess that first impressions were disappointing. Their contact with civilization has had a degrading effect, as in most cases they have come into touch with an undesirable class of white man first. In New South Wales the big majority of them are half-castes, and because of the way the mixture has come about, most of them have inherited the weaknesses of both races. They have lost the moral standards of the aborigines, and follow the example of the class of white man they first came into contact with.

Considering this, and the environment in which most of them have been brought up, the triumph of the Grace of God is the more manifest in the lives of those who have been truly converted. There are a number, who show by transformed lives, that the Gospel of Christ is still the power of God unto everyone who believeth.

For over 40 years missionaries of different societies have been working amongst them, and though there have been many disappointments, results have proved the work well worth while. Apart from the outstanding cases, there are a number who in their hearts love the Lord, and desire to live the Christian life, but are often overcome by the great temptations they have to face. In such cases we know that "the Lord knoweth them that are His," and God is able to make them stand.

There are many who have heard the Gospel frequently, but remain indifferent. For these we continue in prayer, that the Holy Spirit may convict them of their sin. Many of this class are held by drinking, and gambling and kindred evils. Then there are still many as sheep having no shepherd, to whom we pray workers may soon be sent.

The material conditions of those in New South Wales are much better than those in other States. Small reserves have been granted for them by the Government, and also materials for building huts in which to live. Most of them are on relief work, or receive rations and clothing from the Government. On the other hand, under present conditions, there is no opportunity for them to improve their position, and become self-supporting. Many of them are quite competent of doing so if they had the opportunity.

Considering the spiritual needs of these people, and how our opportunity for giving them the Gospel is quickly passing, we would urge upon the Christina people of our land to join in prayerful co-operation with us for their salvation. May we not be guilty of withholding good from them to whom it is due, while it is in the power of our hands to do it.

Mr Mathieson is the missionary at the Purfleet native reserve, Manning River, New South Wales.



Thinking of Suicide?

Suicide is not painless

David W. T. Brattston

Are you thinking of committing suicide? The following will not lecture you on religious duties or responsibilities, for religion or a sincere but mistaken perception of it is often prompts suicidal thoughts, usually because a person erroneously fears they somehow need to please God or society at large but are unable to do so. You have already put a lot of thought into your intended act and have already concluded the alternatives to death are unworkable, but just let me put forward a few suggestions so that you can be certain that you are making a fully-informed decision.

What if it doesn't work?

First, consider what will happen to you if you fail. A great percentage of suicide attempts are unsuccessful. You may survive, only to be a paraplegic or in a permanent coma, straining your family's finances, emotions and labour for decades to come. You may live for decades blind or in constant pain. The attempt may inflict deformities of face or body so hideous that people will avoid you. A failed suicide attempt may well restrict what little enjoyment you now find in life. Of course, you can try again if the result has been lesser injuries, but you will exist in a more miserable state than now and be unable to try again if your first attempt cripples or blinds you.

Get a second opinion. Nobody should rely on their own unaided perceptions or logic when making an important decision in life, and without doing thorough research. It is only prudent to consult with knowledgeable people that can spot advantages, disadvantages, impossibilities or illegalities you overlook in any endeavour, or can put forward a simpler, faster, cheaper or more feasible means to the same goal. If people seek advice and second opinions for important

decisions in life, so much more should you seek them for what is the most important act of your life, and will curtail decades of it.

As for sources of information and a venue for discussing and weighing up your alternatives, there are many telephone hotlines that do nothing but counsel intended suicides. If there are none in your community, telephone a pastor. Clergy are usually trained for such situations. If you are afraid that the counsellor will physi-



cally restrain you and have you forcibly institutionalised if you still want to kill yourself, do not give your name or location on the telephone. Now that long-distance tolls are dirt-cheap, telephone a hotline or pastor in a different part of Australia and do so anonymously. If you would rather risk revealing your identity with the possibility of being forcibly restrained, or if you consider the small price of a direct distance call more valuable than your own life, you should consult a psychiatrist for a neurosis or personality disorder because such false economy or opting for such a hazardous course of action casts doubt on your thinking capacity in any field, including your mental competence to decide about suicide.

Be realistic

Third, forget unrealistic or grandiose hopes. This is particularly addressed to young people. Far too often educators tell a student that he possesses a first-class brain, unusual ability to work hard, and other outstanding personal qualities. Because of these, assures the teacher or professor, the young student can succeed at any endeavour they attempt and will rapidly rise to the top of their field, with steps up the ladder of success being mere formalities. But experience turns out otherwise. Try as they might, the young person fails to fulfil their grand plans, as must be the case when educators say the same to all students even though the path of success is highly competitive, and some people must necessarily occupy lower positions in any organisation or society. Frustration, even suicidal thoughts, creep in due to the teacher's or professor's careless and exaggerated praise.

Contrary to what one might expect, suicide rates are lowest in poor countries where brains and hard work avail no more than keeping body and soul together. These people can aspire to nothing more than staying alive until tomorrow and harbour no expectations of spectacularly succeeding in business, trade, profession or lottery. The higher the hope, the greater the perception of failure, and thus the greater the attractiveness of suicide.

Therefore, spurn flattery about how bright and destined to success you are. Concentrate on working toward realistic and achievable goals. Look for opportunities to advance at every stage or sub-goal on your way to achieving your final (realistic) goal, and celebrate these little successes.

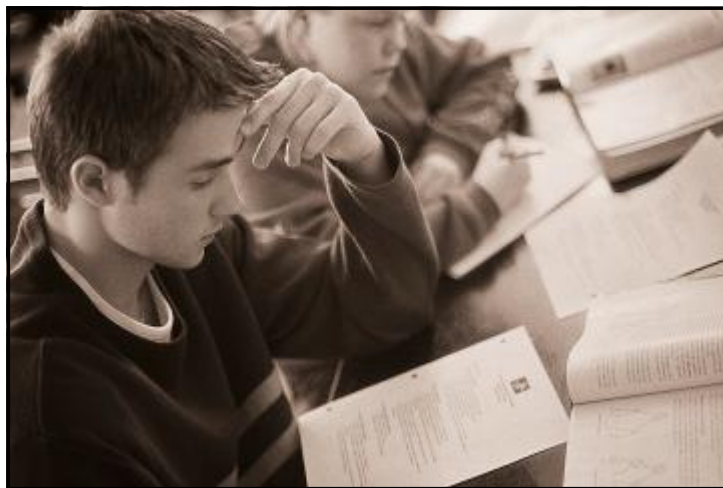
Be challenged

Fourth, study Irish Gaelic. When you think your lot in life could not possibly be worse and that you exist in the worst of all possible worlds, obtain an introductory text for the study of the Irish Gaelic language. Keep reminding yourself that you can stop at any time. The Irish language is more different from English than German or French and far harder for an Anglophone to learn. You know how in Latin and German the ends of words change to indicate meaning? In Irish the beginnings also change, and sometimes the middles as well. This necessitates looking in many places in the dictionary to find one word. The first consonant of nouns changes to indicate grammatical case. Often the sound and spelling of the middle of a noun change with case. There are four cases, with the nominative and accusative forming only one. There are five declensions of nouns, with the declension of one such case being subdivided as to the formation of the plural – and irregular nouns, of course. There are four declensions for adjectives, with irregular adjectives, of course. Even prepositions are declined, with irregular prepositions. Gender is vital, and affects both meaning and nearby words, but brute memorisation is the only way to know the gender. It is common for the same word to have two or more plurals.

You will probably contract a headache or nausea in the first few chapters of the textbook, which are usually on pronunciation and its tenuous relation to spelling. The Irish language is less phonetic than French or even English. This is because English spelling reflects the language spoken in the fifteenth century while Irish is locked into the ninth. In Irish Gaelic sounds in speech are far different from what one would expect from the written form. Written vowels are often pronounced as consonants and vice versa. There are many silent vowels

and silent consonants, sometimes two or three in a row, and even entire syllables.

As with German “ö” and “ü” and their French equivalents, Irish contains many sounds not found in English. While similar or indistinguishable to Anglophones, the difference is vital for distinguishing one Irish Gaelic word from another. There are two different pronunciations each for “d” and “t”. There are four different pronunciations for “l”, which alter the meaning of a word; English has two (as in “light” and “full”) but, unlike Irish, using the wrong pronunciation does not affect meaning. The quality and pronunciation of consonants also alter accord-



ing to the vowel(s) before and/or after them. Again, the sound and spelling of an Irish word can change at the end (as in German and Latin), beginning, or middle.

Be thankful

When your headache or nausea become full-blown from these complex intricacies, put the study book aside and be thankful that you live and are educated where you now are. In Australia, you can stop the study any time you want. This option would not be open to you if you lived in the Republic of Ireland. Years of studying the Irish language is compulsory in schools and the police academy. Without proficiency in Irish, you cannot graduate from secondary school, let alone enter a profession or even become a librarian or schoolteacher.

Professorships in some universities will be denied to you. Until recently, knowledge of Irish Gaelic was necessary for any employment as a civil servant, even as a postal worker.

Studying Irish with the knowledge that you do not have to and can stop whenever you want should lighten your pessimistic outlook on life and lead to lifting your suicidal malaise. Your present situation could well be worse but will not become worse when compared to that of your peers in the Republic of Ireland.

Thought of others?

Fifth and last, consider the effect your act may have on onlookers. The sight of a death in progress will be disturbing—even traumatic—to witnesses, perhaps including children, if you throw yourself under a bus or off a high building. There will be less trauma if you hang or shoot or poison or drown yourself in private, but finding your body will nevertheless be emotionally overwhelming to whoever finds your corpse. Perhaps the first persons to find you will be children at play. Their shock will be worse if your body is not found for some time and becomes bloated or infested with insects.

If you believe that people who committed suicide will go to heaven and that death will take you to a better place, read the next article in this series.

David's address is: Post Office Box 1599, Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, CANADA B0J 2C0, Telephone (902) 634-8473; E-mail dwtbrattston@hotmail.com

The World in the Banner

Who Heads Church of Scotland -- and Church of England?

The Jacobite Intelligencer blog ran a 30 November 2009 article titled "Why 'Devolution Max' is not Enough," commenting on the matter of Scottish Devolution, which concluded, "...[A]n independent Scotland would almost inevitably result in the disestablishment of that strange monster, the Church of Scotland...."

Solicitor and Church of Scotland member Iain Nisbet of the Absolvitor blog responded in an article titled "The Church of (an Independent) Scotland," that "The Church of Scotland is not established. It is the national Church, but the Church of Scotland Act 1921 confirms its independence from the state in matters of discipline, doctrine, worship and government. The head of the Church of England is the Queen, the head of the Church of Scotland is Jesus Christ. As recently as the late 1990's, the Court of Session have confirmed this position. The Scottish Parliament (independent or not) is in no position to alter the constitutional position of the Kirk."

In response to Solicitor Nisbet's clarification, the Jacobite blogger commented: "Thanks for clarifying the constitutional status of the Church of Scotland. However, it is not the case that the Queen is the Head of the Church of England. Every monarch since Elizabeth I has been styled Supreme Governor of the Church of England. I don't think anyone in the Church of England would dispute that Jesus Christ is its Head." The truth is, though, both these bloggers have it seriously wrong. Jesus Christ might be the Head of their denominations on paper but He certainly isn't in reality! Didn't Jesus say, "If you love me you will

obey what I command" (John 14:15)? So which of these denominations is actually adhering to the Bible anymore? Which part does God's Word have in their institutions – churches nowadays infamous for the decisions and actions they do that are unscriptural! It has been a long time since Jesus Christ was actually the Head of either of these State churches. Let's pray that His Spirit might stir up the hearts of men and women in those denominations to get away from trivialities and see the big picture.

Gender-Neutral NIV to go

Publishers in early September 2009 announced that a revision to the New International Version (NIV) Bible will result in publication of a new edition in 2011. Once the 2011 version is published, the 2005 NIV with gender-neutral language will be taken off the market. New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman, sniffed: "They are changing the gender neutral language, no doubt, because their 'base' is conservative evangelical Christians who are offended by anything that appears to have a feminist agenda behind it, not because the language has changed. If it has changed, of course, it has changed toward greater gender neutrality - except in religiously and politically conservative circles."

+ *Chicago Tribune*

Church Doggedly Pursuing Church Growth

A news item from America went like this: *Pastor Tom Eggebeen of the Covenant Presbyterian Church, Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), in Los Angeles, California, in a successful attempt to boost church attendance, began inviting churchgoers to*

bring with them their canine companions.

Pastor Eggebeen is a dog lover himself, and says the reason he decided to invite the dogs is: "Not only are they important family members, but there's more to it than that. They belong to God, too, by gum." When asked if he believes that dogs have souls, Eggebeen replies: "When God created life, he blessed every dimension of it. So we share that with all the animals of the world." People attending the services have their hands full keeping their dogs quiet and still, so there are no hymnbooks - but the church does supply dog biscuits. Most of the dogs settle down on the floor or in their owners' laps, and turn their attention to the pastor's message.

Churches in the time prior to central heating often welcomed dogs as a practical way for the parishioners to warm their feet during the service. One advantage of box pews, a.k.a. pews with doors, is that they served to keep the animals with their owners and apart from the other dogs.

So what do you think? An idea we could try here? Of course not! Once a church gets to this stage to attract others in it really has lost the plot altogether. Then it is no more than a social club with a common love for dogs. Aside from alienating those who don't like dogs, it is the preaching, teaching and living out of the gospel which should be the only focus for bringing others in. Indeed, that's a special thing we have within our churches as we use only God's Word for all that we do in the worship service.

+ *National Public Radio, 635 Massachusetts Avenue, Northwest, Washington DC 20001*

Society in the Banner

Worshipping at the Altar of Tolerance

Bill Muehlenberg

As people more and more reject the notion of absolute truth and universal morality, they do not remain without belief. The religious sphere, like nature, abhors a vacuum, so people will always find something to take the place of the old verities. Thus today in the West the number one religion is that of "tolerance".

All over the Western world people are turning in droves to this new religion. It is a most suitable religion in an age in which truth is jettisoned and fear of offending anyone becomes the primary concern. As Os Guinness wrote in 2005, "Ours then is a world in which 'Thou shalt not judge' has become the new eleventh commandment, and tolerance the last undisputed virtue."

A recent example

A recent speech given by Liberal frontbencher Joe Hockey is a classic example of the religion of tolerance. I do not mean to pick on Joe, because millions of other Westerners hold to equally silly and incoherent ideas. However, since his speech is getting so much media attention, it is worth looking at in a bit more detail. While the speech is entitled "In Defence of God," it really is no such thing. What it is in fact is a defence of the religion of tolerance. It seems that every silly and nonsensical thing that has ever been said in favour of this religion can be found in his speech. Consider this contender for politically correct paragraph of the year: "Australia has embraced religious diversity. It must always remain so, and as a Member of Parliament I am a custodian of that principle of tolerance. That is why it is disturbing to hear people rail against Muslims and Jews, or Pentecostals and Catholics. Australia must continue, without fear, to embrace diversity of faith provided that those gods are loving, compassionate and just." Where can I begin? Bear in mind that he has just spent a page or two de-

nouncing in the strongest of terms the harm caused by those who dare to take their religious Scriptures "literally" - whatever that means. He has just informed us all how bad it is to take religious texts in any sort of a literal sense.

Who's railing against who?

How in the world can he then turn around and say "it is disturbing to hear people rail against Muslims and Jews, or Pentecostals and Catholics"? Does he not realise that this in fact is the very thing he has just done in his speech? He has just been railing against all four groups - and any other religious groups - for holding to a serious view of their Scriptures. Perhaps a majority of believers in these four groups do indeed take their holy books "literally". Thus the very 'tolerance' that he pleads for is withheld from those with whom he disagrees. So much for tolerance. His speech simply highlights the fact that we of course cannot really live in such a world of non-judgment and sheer tolerance. That is because neutrality is impossible, and no one goes a day without making numerous judgments. In fact, the very notion of tolerance presupposes the fact that you disagree with someone. You do not tolerate someone that you fully agree with. You do not tolerate an idea you fully embrace. You can only tolerate something if you happen to disagree with it in the first place. That is the older and correct understanding of the word tolerance. It said, "I don't agree with you, but I respect your right to argue your case". The new understanding of the term says this: you must fully agree with me, my ideas, my beliefs, my practices, my lifestyle, my ideology, etc, or you are being intolerant. That of course is not tolerance - that is coercion: 'embrace me and my beliefs or else'.

The illiberal liberal religion

But this warped understanding of tolerance is all the rage in modern secular societies. J. Budziszewski calls this religion of tolerance the "illiberal liberal religion". In his important new book, *The Line Through The Heart* (ISI, 2009), he explains why such "tolerance" must be intolerant and illiberal:

"Does liberalism live up to neutrality? The answer is no, because neutrality is logically impossible. It is not a bad idea; it fails to rise to the level of an idea. One must choose what to tolerate, what to accommodate, what to encourage - and choice, by its nature, is never neutral." He nicely demonstrates the complete nonsense of Joe Hockey's statement quoted just above: "If you really believe that the meaning of tolerance is tolerating, then you ought to tolerate even intolerance. If you really believe that the best foundation for toleration is to avoid having strong convictions about good and evil, then you should not try to harbor the strong conviction that intolerance is bad."

Mr Hockey clearly has some strong convictions about certain things, and he wants his listeners to share his convictions. And it is quite clear that he is very intolerant of those who disagree with his position. But this is all done under the guise of "tolerance".

No absolute truth

Evidently he does not see the glaring incoherence and inconsistency of his position. This is because his faith turns out to be little more than the modern, vacuous religion of 'tolerance'. His beliefs fully encapsulate the spirit of the age, but bear little resemblance at all to historic Christian teachings. He, like so many other trendy moderns, has completely ditched the notion of absolute truth, and with it,

the laws of logic, and common sense. All he is left with is his mushy, sentimental concept of tolerance which has taken on the place of religious conviction.

Dorothy Sayers once well described such wishy-washy nonsense: "In the world it is called Tolerance, but in hell it is called Despair, the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, hates nothing,

finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and remains alive because there is nothing for which it will die." Or as G.K. Chesterton once put it, "Tolerance is the virtue of the man without convictions." Mr Hockey may hope that his religious embrace of tolerance will put him in good standing with the electorate. It may well, if the electorate no longer has any place for logic, truth, common sense, and hard thinking.

But for those of us who value such goods, the speech of Mr Hockey simply demonstrates what a downward spiral modern public life is on. It is not something to celebrate, but to worry about. It really means the death of a culture, and the embrace of nihilism, anarchy and irrationality.

*From Bill Muehlenberg's **Culture Watch** November 12, 2009*

Children under the Banner

Find 30 Books of the Bible!

There are 30 books of the Bible in this paragraph. Can you find them? This is a most remarkable puzzle. It was found by a gentleman in an airplane seat pocket on a flight from Los Angeles to Honolulu, keeping him occupied for hours. He enjoyed it so much he passed it on to some friends. One friend from Illinois worked on this while fishing from his john boat. Another friend studied it while playing his banjo. Elaine Taylor, a columnist friend was so intrigued by it she mentioned it in her weekly newspaper column. Another friend judges the job of solving this puzzle so involving, she brews a cup of tea to help her nerves. There will be some names that are really easy to spot. That's a fact. Some people, however, will soon find themselves in a jam, especially since the book names are not necessarily capitalized. Truthfully, from answers we get, we are forced to admit it usually takes a minister or scholar to see some of them at the worst. Research has shown that something in our genes is responsible for the difficulty we have in seeing the book in this paragraph. During a recent fund raising event, which featured this puzzle, the Alpha Delta Phi lemonade booth set a new sales record. The local paper, The Chronicle, surveyed over 200 patrons who reported that this puzzle was one of the most difficult they had ever seen. As Daniel Humana humbly puts it, the books are all right there in plain view hidden from sight. Those able to find all of them will hear lamentations from those who have to be shown. One revelation that may help is that books like Timothy and Samuel may occur without their numbers. Also, keep in mind that punctuation and spacers in the middle are normal. A chipper attitude will help you compete really well against those who claim to know the answers. Remember there is no need for a mad exodus, there really are 30 books of the Bible lurking somewhere in the paragraph waiting to be found!



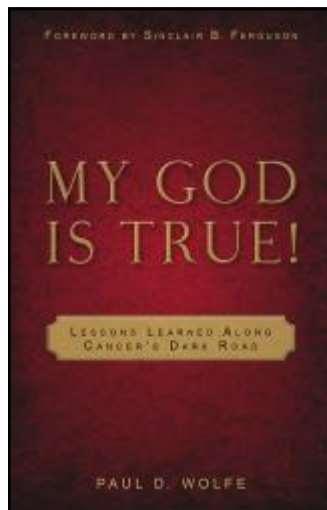
Books in the Banner

My God is True!

Paul D. Wolfe, Banner of Truth, 2009

This book is subtitled 'Lessons learned along Cancer's Dark Road', and that sums it up well. At a time in his life when one would have normally have so much to look forward to, Paul Wolfe's life took a quite different turn. After having suffered some disconcerting pains and bodily reactions, particularly emanating from his back, he sought specialist medical help. Very soon that brought about the diagnosis of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. It was a sharp learning curve for Paul and his new wife, but one he takes us also through in a very clear way in this book.

It is a book that, while detailing the year-



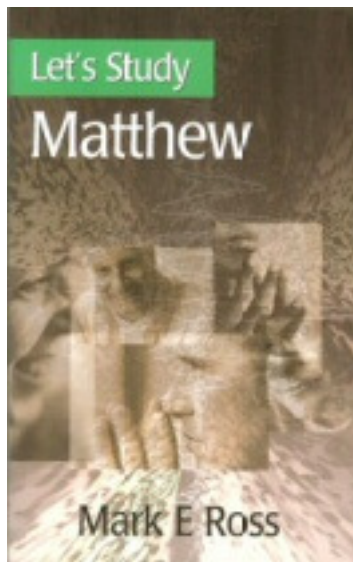
long struggle he had with cancer, also brings home a strongly spiritual message. Faith in Jesus Christ is the heart of this book and it's He with the loving Heavenly Father, who sent His Son to die for us, who very much comes out. In a structure of three 'Acts' the reader is much encouraged in this looking to the Lord. The only reservation I would have is that the book can be theological at times (Paul was a theological student when he underwent the struggle with cancer and subsequently became a pastor). It is well worth the effort and certainly one of the better books I have read on this subject.

Let's Study Matthew

Mark Ross, Banner of Truth, 2009

Let's Study Matthew is the latest addition to the growing series of expository books designed to deepen our commitment to follow Jesus. This book is not strictly speaking a technical commentary. Though the author is alert and well-informed of current trends in New Testament scholarship, the book does not provide exegetical observations on every verse of the passage nor does it attempt to solve every difficult text. In fact, Ross humbly admits that when "confronted with difficult passages, sometimes we must be content to live with the mystery that is left to us after all our efforts to resolve it" (p.101). The book instead offers short and thoughtful reflections on selected biblical passages. These reflections are not dense or demanding but conveniently arranged into devotional-sized chapters that can be easily studied individually or during a period of 26 weeks in Bible study group (material for study and discussion is provided in pp. 301-328).

I have really appreciated Ross' ability to communicate deep truths clearly and concisely, but what really impressed me more was the author's evident passion for theology. Ross is a professional theologian and the knowledge of the field which he teaches breaks out at times in his opportune interaction with historical theological confessions of the Christian Church (pp.10, 33, 286-287). By appealing to these theological formulations, the writer helps us to see that Christian doctrine is not simply a spontaneous afterthought, but an affirma-



tion that theological interpretation takes place in agreement with the faithful across the centuries. In terms of defining the literary structure of *Matthew*, Ross argues that even though a biographical format is clearly discernable, (i.e. topical selections, and chronological arrangement of the ministry of Jesus), the *Gospel of Matthew* is best understood as actual "revelations of God through the words and deeds of Jesus, focused on the making of the new covenant" (p. xvi).

Thus, the Gospels are more or less 'literary portraits', in which we see 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2Cor. 4:6). In light of this, it is important for readers to remember that Matthew has a strategic role in the historical development of God's plan of salvation. Like the ancient prophets of Israel, He too was a mouthpiece of God carried along by the Holy Spirit (2Pet. 1:21). This Gospel then, is a particular documentation of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, which is connected with everything that has gone before. It contains a distinctive emphasis that helps us appreciate the "manysplendoured elements that make up the full spectrum of divine revelation". (p. xviii). In short, I think that it will be very hard to come away from this book without a feeling of having experienced a fresh understanding of the things that God has given to us.

Rev. Andres Miranda

Churches in the Banner

Mulgrave, Melbourne



The newly renovated and enlarged church

Knox/ All Nations

The year 2009 was an encouraging one with increased attendances, increased givings and, we trust, increased spiritual growth. Following official recognition as a PCEA minister on 31 October, Rev Andres Miranda was engaged full time from 1 December. He has special responsibility for the All Nations work where a morning service began on 7 June. Numbers are typically 20 to 30 with a number of locals involved. The building extension was completed without a hitch in December, and a New Year's Day thanksgiving service was again held with folk from Narre Warren joining in bringing the numbers to 65 or so. Rev Sjirk Bajema was

New Year's Day Thanksgiving Service 2010

preacher on this occasion, his text being Proverbs 29:18. We also had the pleasure of the company of three Baptist ministers (and their wives) with past connections with the building:

Rev Graeme Lowe (pastor 1992-97) was largely responsible for the substantial renovation of the building in 1997. Rev Alex White had given significant supply and Rev Eddie Smith had held the pastorate 1998-2008. The first Lord's Day service for the Sudanese service was held 3 January 2010. In the absence of Mr Yoa overseas Dr Ward was the invited preacher. The church was filled for the occasion with 188 present including about 60 in the Sunday school rooms. The message was based on Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. A more formal celebration will be held when

Mr Yoa returns. The Glen Huntly building was vacated by the child-care centre on 15 January which tied in well with the granting of a Planning permit for conversion to five residential units on 22 December. Given that we no longer have the income from the childcare centre we plan to progress this project in 2010 so that we are better able to support the work in 2011 and beyond.

RSW



The Ministers and their wives.

From left: Sjirk and Betty-Ann Bajema; Kerry and Eddie Smith; Andrea and Andres Miranda, Graeme and Wendy Lowe; Ellen and Alex White; and Anna and Rowland Ward.

Jim Elson ~ Deacon

Albert James Elson, known with affection as Jim, was born in Ulverstone on the 23rd March 1924. When he left school he started work as a labourer at Wilson's Saw Mills. He eventually became apprenticed to Hensby Brothers and his home building career began. At 18 he enlisted for the army and spent time in East Timor and Darwin. He was in Darwin during the raids there 1942/43. Upon returning home after the war he resumed his building career with Best and Pearson Builders, and later was employed by De Jong and Sons. Mr and Mrs De Jong belonged to the PCEA congregation and the sons to the Reformed Church. After leaving that company he went out on his own as a sub-contractor.

Jim and Bunny Bellchambers, who had been converted under the ministry of W.P. Nicholson (1876-1959), were married in 1957 at the Baptist Church, which he had helped build. He built the home at 12 Goddard Street where they spent their life together and raised two children, Shane and Julie. Jim loved to play the accordion (he



was self-taught), and also enjoyed reading.

Jim was associated with the movement that impacted Tasmania in the late 1950s and led to the ordaining of three men by the PCEA in 1961 who then formed what is now known as the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. In 1965 the Penguin congregation was received into the PCEA and Jim was a deacon. He continued in that position until his death although of recent years was not able to take an active part. Jim was a quiet, cheerful and helpful man, with a dry sense of humour. He did whatever he did conscientiously. He did work on the PCEA building in Ulverstone erected in 1977, but in whatever he did he did it as to the Lord. A large congregation gathered in the Reformed Church to pay their last respects following Jim's death on 6th December. To Bunny and the wider family we extend our loving sympathy.

Obituary

RSW

Brisbane

Family Camp 2009 Report



Study groups



Here's Uncle Eric — but where's Ross?

Some of us approached the 2009 PCEA Brisbane Family Camp (27-29 November) with slight trepidation knowing that our stalwart Master Chef had left us for a holiday and the balmy Scottish Winter (which proved to be the coldest for 50 years). Our advice is that they should have shared in our joy and fellowship at the Annual Camp at Lennox Head where the weather was a pleasant 30C and campers could venture to the nearby surfing beach, the pristine tea tree lake, walk through the tranquil surrounds or just enjoy the time to renew friendships and make new ones.

As always, it was a good time to share with those from other congregations and we acknowledge the special efforts made by the Daniels family (Sydney), the Hilberts and Hamilton families (Wauchope) and the Carswell and Busch families (Rockhampton) in travelling many hours to the camp.

Sjirk Bajema (Narre Warren) spoke on The Church and its Communion with Christ from the Westminster Confession of Faith (Chapters 25-26) 'Of The Church' and 'Of The Communion Of The Saints'. Two insightful studies on Saturday involved clear explanations of each topic, some modern day examples and applications which re-

sulted in lively discussion groups. The talks are available on the Narre Warren website and should be beneficial for all those who were unable to attend the camp (and for those who were asleep and for those who have forgotten) and for those who would just like to hear them again.

Fiona Lenane coordinated the children's program and was supported by many eager helpers in their studies on Ruth. The children were divided into three groups and asked to suggest a group name somewhat related to the beach. Agreement was reached on the names 'Eels', 'Dolphins' and 'Killer Whales' (chosen by the all girl pre-school group). The children were able to show their craft and handiwork at the Saturday evening concert. Some new performers joined the old favourites (not OLD – time honoured), but Eric the ventriloquist (and Ross his puppet) once again proved to be the highlight of the evening as he captured the hearts of the entire audience (all 55 of them!). The entertainment continued with a hotly contested trivia quiz won by one of the participating teams. The evening concluded with a supper of freshly baked scones (delicious! Thanks Sonja).

On Sunday morning the melodic voices

from Wauchope, Maclean, Sydney, Rockhampton and Brisbane (yes Ian Lenane was absent) all united in an hour of Psalmody that preceded morning Worship. Favourites from the '1650 Psalter' and the newer 'Sing Psalms' versions were enjoyed by all.

Realising the great benefit of a weekend of fellowship and Bible study, and in thanks to God for His great mercy, the congregation gave generously to the New Believers Camp in India (which Pradeep Kumar spoke of during his visit).

The apprentice cooks survived the task of catering for the masses... or was it the masses survived the task of eating what the apprentice cooks had made. We think the masses may have even put on some weight. The fellowship, studies, food and activities were greatly enjoyed by all with many promising to return next year. Thank you to all who contributed to the success of the camp. We trust, Lord willing, that we see many of you again and new faces for the 2010 camp (26-28 November).

Stewart Carswell



Camp Drewe Participants 27-29 November



Attendees of the Mulgrave Thanksgiving Service New Year's Day 2010