



the presbyterian banner

May 2010

*O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name
in all the earth!*

Psalm 8:1

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Editorial

You might recall the time when the prophet Elijah felt very much alone. In 1st Kings 19:14 we hear his complaint to the Lord that he is the only prophet of the Lord's left – and now he's going to be killed too! And that's how it can also seem today. There seem to be so few left amongst churches and Christians who are still faithful to the Lord. Everywhere you look, it seems as if the devil has totally deceived Christendom. Why are there so few who hold to God's Word? How come so few treat the Lord's Day in the way the commandment clearly tells us to do? And why have so many marriages within churches gone the same way as many in the world? And that's not to consider the countless other examples of folk who've fallen away.

The good news is that Elijah was not alone. As the Lord told him just four verses on, He still had 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal or compromised their faith in other ways.

This is a great encouragement. And we need to see it in our day too. While it often seems so grim from where we are and we can feel all alone, the Lord always has others working faithfully along. Many will be in other churches and denominations, perhaps with quite different views on certain doctrines. But they hold strongly to the Word just as we do. They preach and teach the Word. They live by the Word. And while we might raise an eyebrow or two at how they interpret the Word, it is very much God's Word that matters to them. I personally have had the most encouraging fellowship with believers from different theological traditions, including conservative Pentecostals. In fact, I have found those folk more sincere and genuine in their stand on Scripture than many in the denominations I've served. And we are those with the great doctrines of grace!

This is what we also see in this issue of 'The Presbyterian Banner'. At first it might resemble quite a mixed bag, with all sorts of seemingly unrelated articles and information coming from across Christendom. What could tie together a cult specialist in Perth with a Reformed Church minister in Melbourne and a non-denominational Christian morals ministry? And then there's everything else covered in this issue as well!

Well, I hope you can spot what does tie them all together. In fact, I pray that it becomes very obvious what they have in common as you read the articles – because it's a total reliance on the truth of God's Word alone.

*It is a great thing, this reading of the Scriptures!
For it is not possible ever to exhaust the mind of the Scriptures.
It is a well that has no bottom.*

John Chrysostom

Cover Photo: A Gum tree in the Royal Botanical Garden, Cranbourne, 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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When will they ever learn?

Albert Esselbrugge

Back in the nineteen sixties there was a popular protest song (by Pete Seeger) against war that started with the question, 'Where have all the flowers gone?' It seems that all the young girls picked them, and the first verse ends, as does each verse of the song, 'When will they ever learn?' The second verse asks where all the young girls have gone — 'taken husbands, every one.' 'When will they ever learn?' Up to this point it all sounds fine, but the third question asks where all the young men have gone. Well, they've 'gone for soldiers, every one.' 'When will they ever learn?'

Things are suddenly becoming serious, and the next question doesn't do anything to dispel the impending sense of doom that is creeping into the song. Not that the music changes. I'm not sure whether I have the right classification for the song, but it always sounded to me like a folk song. The music was easy to sing along to. The words could be clearly distinguished as it was sung, and there was a gentle peaceful flow to it.

Where have all the soldiers gone? They took a long time passing, but where have they all gone? They've 'gone to graveyards, every one.' 'When will they ever learn?'

The final lines of the song ask where all the graveyards have gone. But of course, they are covered with flowers, every one. 'When will they ever learn?'

It's also in the Bible

In my personal reading of the

Scriptures, I have been reading Judges lately, and this same question came to my mind — when will we ever learn? While battles are mentioned there, it wasn't the issue of war that made me think of this song. What struck me was how the people of God had been led through years of testing and refining in the wilderness, and how they had been led by the hand of God at each step, and fed with manna every working day of the week, and then He led them into the promised land, and all their enemies fell before them.



I know how history developed, and yet it gets me every time. Though I should know better, I still expect to see how the people were filled with zeal and passion at the greatness of God. What we see however is how quickly they fell away from serving the Lord and turned to idols and paganism. They got lazy about completing the job of completely taking the land and removing the enemies of the Lord. That, as we know, gave them much grief throughout the Old Testament, but there was still mighty victory everywhere they went under the leadership of God's servant Joshua.

Joshua comes to the end of his service. In Judges 2:8 we're told that this 'servant of the Lord' died. Verse 10 then tells us something that I simply cannot grasp. I know it is true. I have seen this repeated many times in many families, but it still leaves me utterly baffled. After the generation of victorious conquering people who had come from the wilderness and fought mighty battles under the blessing of God had died, the generation which followed 'knew neither the Lord nor what He had done for Israel', and they did evil in the eyes of the Lord and turned to idolatry. Didn't their parents tell them the stories of the mercies of God, and read the Scriptures to their children?

Teach your children well

We're told the children didn't know God or what He had done for them. How often do you talk with your children, simply telling them the stories of the greatness of God and showing them the mighty hand of God in all things?

Don't be put off. This is critical. They must learn to love to hear the works of God in the past as much as you love to spend time reflecting on them and learning from them.

As you read on further through Judges though, the same thing is repeated time after time. God sent calamity against the people, so that they cried out to Him and He arranged things to restore them. He raised up judges to lead the people, and for the most part the judges served the Lord and brought peace to the people. However, the cycle just keeps being repeated; and I ask, 'when

will we learn?' As soon as the judge died, the people almost immediately turned away from the Lord and 'did evil in the eyes of the Lord; they forgot the Lord their God' and turned to idols.

It's also in the Church today

This is what puzzles me so deeply – after God has given us His Word to show us His way, and His dealings with people who serve and worship Him alone, and we see what He does and what happens to people who turn away from Him, and after we have been blessed with revelations of the greatness of God's mercy in Christ Jesus which the Old Testament people could only

see dimly, has anything actually changed? Instead of turning to the Lord at each and every step of the way, the Church looks for business models to rescue its declining numbers.

When we should be bowing in repentance for relying on ourselves and worshipping the feelings and thoughts of man, the church celebrates the sensitivities and goodness of people. Instead of again being openly and deliberately God-centred, we are more concerned about the negative perceptions people have of One who calls us sinners and shows us our lost and dead condition in order to reveal the Saviour, dying, dead and alive again, who came

and worked God's grace to make peace for us with God. Where have all God's people gone who are utterly determined and focused on serving God and His glory and honour alone? Where have all the churches gone? They lie covered by the flowers of man's efforts, good intentions, fears, and man's failure to keep God front and centre.

'When will they ever learn?'

The Rev. Albert Esselbrugge is the minister of the Reformed Church of Box Hill.

The Past for Today

Tertullian of North Africa

One of the most interesting of early Christian writers was a man called Tertullian – or Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, to give him his full name. He was born about AD 160 in the important city of Carthage, in what is modern Tunisia. His father was the captain of a Roman legion and the son was educated for the law. We don't know all that much about his personal life, but he lived the dissolute life common in those days. It is likely that he was impressed by the way Christians faced martyrdom in the arena, and became a Christian himself about 193.

A passionate believer

As a Christian, Tertullian was full on. He was a born controversialist, a passionate defender of the Christian faith, had a strongly puritanical

streak and inveighed against the laxity that was coming into the Church. He is fiery and eloquent, but not always persuasive. He



Rowland S. Ward

was the first to write in Latin, and his works are vigorous and clear-cut. He never wrote a systematic theology, but he did respond to particular issues. We know of 31 of his writings, but there many others now lost. He coined the word 'trinity' used ever after by the orthodox, and was the author of many memorable phrases such as, 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?' (in reference to pagan philosophy), and 'the blood of the [martyred] Christians is seed' [of the Church].

Joined the Montanists

Around AD 205 Tertullian joined a group that had originated in Phrygia in modern Turkey around AD 155, give or take 20 years. Their leader was a man called Montanus, who spoke as if he was the mouth-piece of the Holy Spirit, to-

gether with two female prophetesses. They spoke in ecstatic visions and announced that Christ would soon return and apparently establish the New Jerusalem in Pepouza in Phrygia, although Tertullian taught that the millennial reign would be from the site of the old Jerusalem in Judea.

A rigorous discipline was promoted but it does not appear that the Montanists were initially judged heretical. However Eleutherus, the bishop of Rome AD 174-189, declined to recognize the Montanists and they were condemned in 177. Pockets of Montanists continued to exist for several centuries, and the advocacy of Tertullian in North Africa gave them some traction. The rigor of the discipline advocated by Tertullian, including compulsory fasting, avoidance of marriage and certainly avoidance of a second marriage, became quite common in the mainstream of the Church in the 3rd century with the rise of monasticism.

Lessons from his life

There are a number of lessons from Tertullian's life, closing with his death about AD 226. One notes his clear-cut testimony to Christian truth as he understood it. His link with the Montanists suited his personality, but was also a reflection of their common reaction to the comfortable and worldly Church evident in many places by the second half of the second century. His reaction went too far, as is the case with most such events, and had its own problems as well; producing a not-altogether-balanced counter-reaction from the mainstream.

Montanism is hard to describe since the sources are generally hostile accounts, but it conveyed one matter that was really important — namely, that the Church in its essence is not simply church leaders but the people of God led

by the Spirit, even when they do not grant the Spirit his true role. Probably, just like modern Pentecostalism, its obvious modern parallel, there were varieties of teaching. Certainly Montanism was divisive. Even in Tertullian's time we see the distinction between carnal



Codex Balliolensis, Tertullian's *Apologetics*.

and spiritual Christians that fostered two classes of Christians — carnal and spiritual — and the 'church within a church' mentality. Despite aspects of over-reaction to protect the status of Church leaders and to enshrine the position of the organized Church, the Church was right to recognize that Montanism was not the genuine article: its emphasis on ecstatic prophecies and the prominence of women made it objectionable. As Epiphanius was to argue in the 4th century, prophecy was intelligent: the Spirit did not bypass the mind. Furthermore, the content of what was said at times was rather alarming, with the prophetic utterances being given greater status than the Scripture by some. Marcion had virtually abolished the idea of a real return of Christ with his rejection of the Old Testament and the real incarnation of Jesus,

but a number of early Christian writers, as well as Tertullian and the Montanists, had a millennial view that owes something to Jewish thinking about six 1000-year periods climaxing with a Sabbath of 1000 years, and thus a total of 7000 years of world history. Perhaps this too was a reaction: in the third century there was a good deal written against it and the literal interpretation of the Book of Revelation. Ultimately Augustine (354-430) moved from the premillennial view to an allegorical view — the view that saw the millennium as Christ's reign with his saints, and thus in effect the period between the ascension of Christ and his return. Augustine's view has remained extremely influential to the present day, and rightly so.

The debt we owe him

Tertullian is after Augustine the most important theological writer of the early Western church. While we can recognize his limitations, he is a man I warm to. The Western Church, though never acknowledging him as a Doctor of the Church, is greatly indebted to him for the clarity of his thinking and his careful employment of technical theological language. His experience is also a reminder of the danger of polarization: the truth in controversy itself is not always entirely on one side. Thus in reaction to Pentecostalism one should indeed reject its two-stage theology of Christian experience, and its ready equating of modern gifts with what is found in the New Testament. But in rejecting such errors we must not quench the Spirit by denying his true role in bringing people to faith and enabling them to live a new life by his indwelling presence.

Beware Wikipedia!

Murray Adamthwaite

In the academic field I need constantly to remind students to check their data from reliable sources: reputable books by known and respected authors in the field of study in question; articles in peer-reviewed journals, again by reputable authors; and when they happen to become available, personal communications with such authors and scholars. However, the advent of the Internet has now clouded the issue of sourcing. Together thousands of sites display a welter of information, much of which is anonymous, at times borrowed wholesale from other sites, copied from out-of-date encyclopaedias, or just plain misinformation from sloppy research.

The danger

One primary site used constantly as a prime source, not only for students but for researchers generally and even teachers, is Wikipedia. One can "Google" on any topic, personality or issue, and up will come the relevant Wikipedia entry.

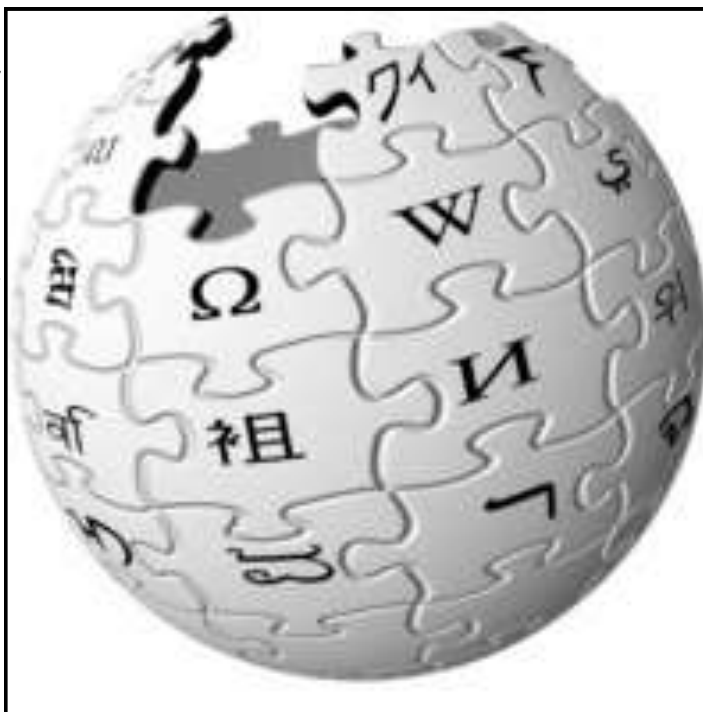
Despite the convenience – and extent – of the information from this source, it has serious problems, as follows:

Wikipedia can be amended by any viewer according to his own whims, and does not necessarily require documentation. Hence one can never know who is responsible for any piece of discussion at any given point of an article. He could be well-versed in the field, or a rank amateur!

The amount of documentation varies from article to article.

Quite often there is none at all. Moreover, there is no peer-review process.

Wikipedia's hosts will vet all posts and alterations to those posts as they see fit. Those hosts are, to the best of my knowledge, all politically correct and left-wing liberal in their outlook ... Thus any specifically Christian content is likely to be edited out or at least modified.



The factual information in Wikipedia, while broadly correct, can all too often be misleading and even plain wrong. Hence it always needs to be checked against reliable sources.

Therefore this source must be used with great caution, and when cited at all it must be done so with reserve and qualification.

Some examples

Let me give several examples of this unreliability:

Some months ago I was re-

searching the reign of Charles I and the struggle which led to the English Civil War. Charles summoned three parliaments in the first four years of his reign (1625-1629), but when I examined the relevant entries in Wikipedia I found confusion concerning those early years. I checked its material against the new, and magisterial, book by Austin Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution* (OUP, 2002): the

latter not only sorted out the confusion, but showed how incorrect Wikipedia was in its order and chronology, and therefore in its explanation of how Charles came to rule without a Parliament from 1629 to 1640.

A second instance concerns the editing out of anything Christian. Probably the most outstanding figure of reform and philanthropy during the Victorian period was Anthony Ashley Cooper, the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury (1801-

1885), whose untiring labours for the welfare of children occupied him as a Member of Parliament for almost fifty years. He inaugurated the many Factory Acts to reduce and finally abolish child labour; as president of the Ragged School Union he promoted these institutions until education for the young up to a certain age became enshrined in law; and gave generously to philanthropic causes throughout his life. The motivation for his work was his deeply Christian evan-

gical faith which he had received from a Methodist housemaid in his youth, but the short and perfunctory entry in Wikipedia makes no mention of any of this. The most it will say is that he was a “religious man”. Likewise with other examples: such is the aversion to Christianity that, when faced with the obvious evidence of Christian outlook in such people as Hannah More or William Wilberforce, the most the authors will concede is that they possessed a “religious” motivation.

Its political bias

The final example is even more serious: some time ago there was an exchange between Lawrence Solomon, author of the anti-global-warming book *The Deniers* (Richard Vigilante Books, 2008), and the Wikipedia host. This had to do with the “findings” of the California scientist and warming alarmist Naomi Oreskes regarding global warming (GW). The dispute, in summary, went as follows:

Dr Benny Peiser, a very prominent UK scientist, had challenged the conclusions of Oreskes, who had been given a very approving write-up on a Wikipedia page, without any hint of dissent. Solomon checked with Peiser, who informed him that the statements on Wikipedia were distorted and incorrect,

whereupon Solomon amended the pages accordingly (as anyone can do). Imagine Solomon’s dismay when he found that *within minutes* his corrections had been re-edited or deleted! When he contacted the host of Wikipedia’s pages on this issue he was met with an effete reply that “We have a reliable source...” In vain did Solomon plead that Peiser had verified his concerns with him personally only in the previous hour or so. No; what the host had written she had written.

A perusal of all of Wikipedia’s pages on the GW issue reveals that every sentence has been vetted to ensure that the GW faith is presented in all its purity, without demur. It seems Wikipedia is carefully vetted on a regular basis to make sure that no contradiction is admitted which

WIKIPEDIA

may raise doubts about the green faith. Yet the same people would raise a hue and cry about ‘censorship’ in many other connections.

Another, even more egregious, example of Wikipedia mendacity arose quite recently (14December.) concerning Rev. Joseph Farah, one of the hosts of World Net Daily, a conservative news site. Wikipedia actually

declared Farah to be a “noted homosexual of Lebanese and Syrian heritage”.¹ A couple of years ago the hosts claimed that Farah had conducted an affair with “a prominent female columnist”. Whether he is a heterosexual philanderer or noted homosexual, both charges are fatuous nonsense. Farah complains that when he contacted the hosts, “I was even told I was not a reliable source of information about me.” His conclusion: “(Wikipedia) is a wholly unreliable website run by political and social activists promoting their own agenda.”

The Farah episode, along with the other examples, only highlights the fact that Wikipedia is *in no sense* a reliable source on a level with Encyclopaedia Britannica or Chambers. In the academic sphere, if your lecturer allows you to cite Wikipedia in an essay or paper, he is at that point abdicating responsibility. An astute academic will disallow such citations. When we write our own literature it behoves us as Christian “truthers” to treat such sources with due scepticism and do our homework properly.

Footnotes:

1 <http://www.wnd.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view &pageId=83640>

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Missing your church news and photographs?

Ask your minister or elder how your congregation can be part of this positive promotion of the denomination, as well as keeping the rest of us up with what’s happening!

The Banner on Other Churches

Cult to Church the Major Shift in Cult-Buster Ministries

A Report from Concerned Christian Growth Ministries

LOOKOUT/CCG Ministries began in late 1979. For the first two decades of this Ministry the focus, media involvement, range of enquiries, and overall activities related mostly to cultic groups ranging from Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians through to Hare Krishnas, Moonies (Unification Church/Sun Myung Moon), Rajneeshites/Orange People, Muktananda's Siddha Yoga, T.M. - Transcendental Meditation or Raelians, 'brown' and 'grey' aliens, Alien 'walk-ins' and more. All these various groups ranged across a number of categories such as Western Pseudo Christian Exclusivists; Eastern Pseudo Christian Exclusivists; Eastern Mystical; New Age Spirituality; Human Potential, and the Occult. All these were demonstrably outside mainstream historically orthodox and Biblical Christianity. Many of the groups within these various categories went through their expansion (growth) stages and moved on to their consolidation (keeping members) stages. Many are still around, but no longer expanding; sometimes struggling to maintain their existence. In some cases there are now very few young members (in contrast to their early expansionist years), and in others many of the young people who were born and grew up in these groups, have left or are leaving (often spreading their stories and concerns via the Internet).

In spite of the dislike of the word 'cults' by some academics and 'politically correct' activists, the word has been sued appropriately in many cases, and 'cults' were amongst our major concerns - concerns shared by church and community leaders, as well as the media, during the first two decades of our existence.

Extreme Christian Fringe Groups were also a major concern during those earlier decades. These were generally groups that promoted most Christian basics (in accepted doctrines) they were often on the fringes

of mainstream orthodox Christianity with some of their beliefs; were led by a manipulative and controlling leadership; were generally social isolationist and often attempted to isolate members from their normal support networks of family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances (from workplaces, college or universities, sport and other community clubs and organisations) in order to keep members dependent of the group's leader (s). The impact of these groups is often as damaging to relationships and personal growth and faith development as the worst or most extreme of the cults.

An increasing problem

Today the problem of these Extreme Christian Fringe Groups continues to increase. They are multiplying rapidly around the world. The vast majority of people getting caught up with such groups have little Biblical understanding or background and are unable to see the problems until a great deal of personal damage has occurred. This growth of Christian fringe groups and their extremes has led to the republishing an updated and expanded version of our 1989 book: [The Problem of Extreme Christian Fringe Groups](#), by our Director, Adrian van Leen.

Over the past decade, enquiries about cults have diminished and been replaced by a growing volume of enquiries about problems in various denominational and mainstream Christian Churches. Many have been along similar areas of concern, in spite of denominational differences. The vast majority of calls for help have expressed a deep concern over two main areas: inappropriate leadership styles and lack of sound and Biblical teaching.

Expressions of these two problems have included manipulation and extreme control/domineering by pastors/leader (often younger than many in

the congregation); people over 45-50 actually being told they are not really wanted because they're holding back progress and development (they are of the 'old paradigm' and the pastors/leaders, with their training and knowledge, are of the 'new paradigm'); pastors/leaders claiming that THEY are the church CEO's and THEY run the church, and when they ultimately don't get their way in everything, many 'spit the dummy' and leave - often threatening (and sometimes succeeding) to take half the congregation with them; and more along those lines. Many pastors have been told through training seminars that they need to assert themselves



more; that Jesus, as the Chief Shepherd, was an entrepreneur fattening and building up his flock - as a sheep farmer does - to make a profit. Some pastors/leaders have insisted on organising all church activities for other people (e.g. home study groups, and more) but wouldn't conduct home groups or Bible studies themselves, especially 'after hours' (their hours being 9 to 5 in the church office).

Enormous numbers of faithful Christians, especially long-time members, have been deeply hurt by this style of leadership and have been crying out for a Biblical model of Christ-like Servant leadership, where leaders lead by example of patient love and understanding; study and teach Biblical messages from the Bible; actually get alongside people and exercise pastoral care; set the tone of their congrega-

tions by their Christ-like examples rather than dictatorial declarations.

There is also an increasing concern amongst Christians in congregations over lack of sound Biblical teaching in relation to faith, salvation and Christian living.

These concerns are not so much about change, as they are about excessive change for the sake of

change and the way in which change is brought about, or attempted to be brought about.

In the past decade, in relation to our Ministry and work, more people have been hurt and damaged by the Church than by traditional cults. There has to be a better, more Biblically appropriate way!

Concerned Christian Ministries is a ministry which focuses on helping those who have been abused by manipulative and ingodly cults. Sects, and so-called churches. They publish a magazine called 'Take a closer look'. Their website is www.lookout.org.au

The Synod in the Banner

A preview

Trevor Leggott— Clerk of Synod

From Monday 3rd May to Thursday 6th May our church meets as the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia for the 163rd time since 1846, this time at the Knox Church in Wantirna, Melbourne.

We look forward to the meeting of brethren from across the Eastern States for fellowship and discussion of the spiritual well-being and oversight of the Church. The Rev George Ball, from the Manning congregation, has been nominated as moderator elect for 2010 and we look forward to his devotional input and guidance through the meetings.

This year there is a relatively light schedule (as Clerk I say this with a degree of trepidation, because it often proves that things straightforward things generate quite a bit of discussion and take time to work through!). Business at recent Synods has progressed well, with Committees doing much of the work in advance and generally providing thorough reports for distribution well in advance. There has been encouragement for feedback to Committees before presentation of reports, and this has often resulted in clarification, agreement or compromise, leading to a much smoother flow of business. The Administration Committee has scheduled Synod to commence at 4.30pm on Monday and conclude by the close of the Missionary night on Wednesday evening.

The Congregational statistics in the Administration Committee report include the following observation: "While the figures may fluctuate as rolls are sometimes purged irregularly

the trend is clear: we are not reaching the young and we are ageing." Total church membership has fallen from 530 ten years ago to 459 in 2009.

The Law and Advisory Committee presents information in relation to prudent dealing with issues where a conflict of interest may arise. The Committee also revisits the issue of re-drafting the 1918 NSW Property Act, noting that both it and the Victorian Act need amending to correct some apparent anomalies, especially in relation to matters relating to trusts.

Southern Presbytery will present an overture for the Synod to consider introducing an obligation for ministers to retire from inducted charges after reaching the age of 70 years.



The Missions Committee report contains lengthy summaries of the various areas of interest to our church, each member of the committee being designated to monitor a particular area. The Mission Evening is usually well attended by those interested from local congregations and other churches. This year I will give an update on the developments, especially with leadership training, with Austra-

lian Indigenous Ministries. Paul Morris will share about current happenings with Christian Witness to Israel. This will probably be our last time to hear from Paul, who intends returning to the UK by the end of the year. Our Inter-Church Relations Committee continues to explore contact with other churches, particularly through the International Conference of Reformed Churches. Our church has developed more formal Fraternal Relations with a number of churches, and this year proposes such a relationship with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia. At the time of writing we know of two guests from other churches attending: Rev Ed Blackwood from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia, and Rev Hank de Waard from the Christian Reformed Church of Australia.

On Tuesday afternoon at 2.00pm we have a special guest speaker to address the Synod: Rev Dr Peter Adam, principal of Ridley College, Melbourne. Visitors would be most welcome to come and hear this man speak and join us in fellowship. Please pray with us that the 163rd Synod of Eastern Australia might know the special presence of the Lord as we meet to honour and serve Him and seek His will for our future.

The Rev. Trevor Leggott also serves as the Director of the Australian Indigenous Ministry.

The World in the Banner

Our first Saint?

It was all the headlines at the end of December. Mary MacKillop, a Roman Catholic nun from over a century ago, had passed through an important process on the way to be declaring a "saint" by the Roman Catholic church. Then in February the official pronouncement was made. In October she would move from being beatified to being accepted as a saint. After one hundred years her good works were endorsed with this highest recognition. As those news items went on to say, she would be Australia's first saint.

What? First saint! You must be joking! The gospel's been proclaimed on these shores for well over two hundred years now. Surely there have been other believers long before Mary MacKillop was even born! I mean, isn't it everyone who has faith in Christ Jesus as their own Saviour and Lord one of God's people. That makes them a saint, doesn't it?

Indeed it does. That's why with the news about Mary MacKillop we are introduced into the heart not of biblical theology but of Roman Catholic theology. You see, the official belief of the Church of Rome is that it is not faith alone that saves you. It is faith plus works – and those works can be what especially "good" people have done long ago. This is why Roman Catholics often pray to those long-dead people, such as Mary the mother of Jesus, rather than pleading upon Christ's sacrifice alone. It is why this important step in the "canonisation" of Mary MacKillop involved at least two people being healed by praying to her.

Notice some of the comments said regarding Mary MacKillop: "It will be a time of great excitement for us," said Sister Sheila McCreanor, the congregational secretary-

general of the Josephite order (which MacKillop founded). "We've all been following this journey for many years. It's nice to be part of a group that has such a wonderful model. With the canonisation she will be a model for the world."

Archbishop of Sydney George Pell said that becoming a saint was not easy. "It certainly takes a lot of hard work to follow Christ's teachings heroically for a lifetime," he said. "However, Mary MacKillop did just that. Despite her battles and at times mistreatment, she was certainly a good and great woman."

Isn't it terribly sad that a completely unscriptural burden is placed upon people? Who can say that any sinful man and woman is "good and great"? In the words of Romans 3:10, "There is no one righteous, not even one." And further on Paul says, "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood (Rom. 3:23-25)." Only Jesus Christ was and is good, and it is only because His work for us was perfectly acceptable to the Father that we are saved. No-one and nothing else can do. In fact, because whatever any man or woman does is tainted with sin it can only distract us away from true faith.

Such a news item tells us why we must thank the Lord for the Reformation. He graciously acted to raise up men and women who went back to His Word and proclaimed, and lived by, that Word alone. And that is what we must share with our Roman Catholic neighbour – and all those excited by this sainthood. Such a news item gives opportunity for fruitful conversation. You can start him

thinking about it by simply asking the question: "How do you know you've done enough good to get into heaven?" When he replies, as they usually do, that he hopes he's done enough good to get into heaven ask him if he can ever know for sure. Then you may well have the opportunity to tell him what was rediscovered at the Reformation – the biblical truth that it is by faith alone in Christ alone through grace alone. That's the only genuine assurance! It's nothing we've done, or can do. What a relief!
SB

'Grief, Shock, and Dismay' over Erskine College and Theological Seminary Lawsuit

A 22 March 2010 article by Felicia Kitzmiller in The Index-Journal titled "ARP Delegates Shocked over Suit" reports that the Rev. Dr. John de Witt, Moderator of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church's General Synod (ARP-GS), on behalf of himself and the ARP-GS delegates, expressed 'grief, shock and dismay' over the lawsuit by Erskine College and Theological Seminary board members against the ARP-GS for the recent vote by an approximately two-to-one margin to dismiss fourteen Erskine board members and establish an interim Board of Trustees.

DeWitt is quoted as saying that Presbyterian Church tradition is that decisions are made at various levels within the church courts, and that decisions requiring further examination are done "...in an orderly way, under the provisions of our Book of Government."

Dr. deWitt continued: "It is a firm conviction with us that we do not seek redress by going to law, a conviction based squarely in the

New Testament (1 Corinthians 6:1-8). Most of us find it difficult to understand why the church, which is the proprietor of Erskine College and Seminary, should not be able to put in place trustees who represent the mind and heart of the sponsoring body."

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The Controversy in Historical Perspective

Assistant Professor of History at Patrick Henry College, Visiting Professor of Church History at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, and member of Good News Presbyterian Church (ARP), Frederick, Maryland, Dr. William Van Doodewaard, wrote a March 2010 article for the Reformation21 Blog titled "Shifting Sands at Erskine," which briefly reviews the recent actions of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church's General Synod (ARP-GS) regarding Erskine College and Seminary and the subsequent lawsuit against the ARP-GS by Erskine, then examines the historical context and implications of these events, concluding: "Whether the suit will prove successful is not clear. However, the circumstances themselves are far more revealing of the college's condition. It is very evident that a portion of the Erskine constituency, along with a minority in the denomination, have little regard for working through God-given patterns of church government, perhaps because of the continual growth of the more conservative evangelical majority. That a Synod would call for a greater integration of faith and learning, and a more distinctively Christian worldview in her

institutions ought to be encouraging to a Christian. That a Synod would seek to have its institutions uphold the infallibility and inerrancy of the Scriptures is a baseline, historic distinction between evangelical and liberal trending to secular.

"Though astonishing, this historic event also provides helpful clarity, and a sobering reality check on the depth of decay to address. Concerns regarding the former board and leading parts of the administration, along with a small portion of the denomination, are verified. One would be hard pressed to see why an evangelical denomination would accommodate in her ministries those willing to pursue an end run through civil courts, in defiance of the very nature of Christ's church and her desire to pursue faithfulness. It is difficult to see any reflection of grace, gospel, or biblical justice in attempting to wrest the control of these institutions away from the denomination which formed, supports, and has owned them for nearly 200 years.

"Yet, the sure comfort even in the midst of deep tensions and challenge is that God does honor

those who honor Him; He does work all things together for good to those who love Him. He will certainly do this for a denomination taking up this cross to follow Him, striving for greater faithfulness to His glory."

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Available Online

Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (PRTS) is in the process of scanning all 65,000 library volumes for use with the Puritan Electronic Research Tool (PERT), a tool designed at PRTS for use by pastors, students, and laypeople to help find Scripture references and related commentary that may be buried within a book. PERT is available for use, entirely free, at:

<http://pert.puritanseminary.org/index.aspx>
 + *Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary*, 2965 Leonard Street Northeast, Grand Rapids, Michigan, info@puritanseminary.org

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Society in the Banner

God, Science and Sanity – Evolution vs Creation

Bruce Dunne

The above topics were discussed on ABC's recent television programme, 'Questions and Answers'. One member of the panel was Professor Richard Dawkins whom the panel chairman, Tony Jones, introduced as an evolutionary biologist and outspoken atheist. The first question raised was directed to Richard Dawkins: 'Can one be a believer in God, as well as a believer in the theory of evolution?' Professor Dawkin's reply, in part, was: 'Obviously you can be a believer in God and in evolution because the archbishop of Canterbury is, the previous pope was and the present pope almost is kind of there and so is any bishop, any archbishop, any cardinal, and any priest worthy of the name. It is easy to be both. I have a certain niggling sympathy for the creationists, because I think anybody who's seen the evidence knows that evolution is a fact and so you can't get away from it, but I think the writing's on the wall.' **(See note 'a')**

Tony Jones, chairman of the panel, wasn't completely satisfied with Dawkins' answer. He remarked: 'Evidently forty per cent of Americans disagree with you and they can't reconcile their faith with the theory of evolution.'

Dawkins agreed and added: 'It's even worse than that, because they actually believe that the world is less than 10,000 years old and because the true age of the earth is 4.6 billion years, that's a non-trivial error. I've previously compared it to believing that the width of North America is eight yards.' **(b)**

A question was then raised of the possibility of a belief in a transcendent 'Being' as a symptom of mental illness? This was passed on to mental health expert Patrick McGorry.

Patrick McGorry's reply: 'I've looked after a lot of people over the last 20 or 30 years who have had very significant psychiatric disorders and it's quite common for religious themes to actually manifest within the context of

their symptoms, so religion and mental health do co-exist in that way but clearly, also, spirituality is an important part of positive mental health. So I think there's two sides to this coin.' Professor Dawkin's then commented: 'If you actually met somebody who said he believed that water could turn into wine, a man could walk on water, that a man could raise somebody else from the dead, you'd say, 'Well, put him away.' But because so many people believe it, you take it seriously.'

The discussion then turned to the subject of Absolute Morality. Professor Dawkin's commented: 'The absolute morality that a religious person might profess would include what, stoning people for adultery **(c)**; death for apostasy; punishment for breaking the Sabbath; these are all things which are religiously based absolute moralities. I don't think I want an absolute morality. I think I want a morality that is thought out, reasoned, argued, discussed and based upon, I'd almost say, intelligent design. Can we not design our society, which has the sort of morality, the sort of society that we want to live in? If you actually look at the moralities that are accepted among modern people, among 21st century people — we don't believe in slavery anymore; we believe in equality of women; we believe in being gentle; we believe in being kind to animals.'

Professor Dawkins continued: 'These are all things which are entirely recent. They have very little basis in Biblical or Quranic scripture. They are things that have developed over historical time through a consensus of reasoning, of sober discussion, argument, legal theory, political and moral philosophy. These do not come from religion. To find the good bits in religious scriptures, you have to cherry pick. You search your way through the Bible or the Quran and you find the occasional verse that is an acceptable profession of morality and you say, 'Look at that. That's religion',

and you leave out all the horrible bits. You say, 'Oh, we don't believe that anymore. We've grown out of that.' Well, of course we've grown out of it. We've grown out of it because of secular moral philosophy and rational discussion.'**(d)**

Mr Tony Burke, the Federal Minister of Agriculture, then spoke up in support of Biblical teaching: 'The concept a couple of thousand years ago from a 'bloke' who my faith follows, that says even if someone is your enemy you ought to love them, for me that's a fundamental part of how people should interact with each other ideally. Fundamental — and I reckon that some of the principles that build from that aren't that different from the best humanist principles that Richard wants to cherry pick. But I've got to say if you want to look at the worst that people have done in history, you can find religious examples and you can also find atheist examples. I don't think Mao Tse Tung's China during the cultural revolution as an atheist regime, or Stalin's Russia, are great examples of morality either. People have done some shocking things in human history, sometimes in the name of religion, and sometimes in the name of whatever other division they could find, but to say that that's an argument against religion, I don't think matches the level of logic that Richard's demanding of everyone else.'

Richard Dawkins then displayed his criticism of God's method of salvation: 'If you believe in the New Testament, that God, the all-powerful creator of the universe couldn't think of a better way to forgive humanity's sins than to have himself put on earth, tortured and executed in atonement for the sins of humanity, what kind of a horrible, depraved notion is that?'

The chairman of the panel, Tony Jones, then commented: 'I'm going to jump in here, because is that not a story of sacrifice and therefore has something admirable attached to it

which is the opposite of what you suggested?’

Professor Dawkins: ‘Do you think it's admirable? You think it's admirable that God actually had himself tortured for the sins of humanity?’

Tony Jones: ‘That is the Christian view obviously.’

Richard Dawkins: ‘That is the Christian view. If you think that's admirable, you can keep it.’ **(e)**

Just prior to the conclusion of the discussion, Richard Dawkins gave his opinion of eternal life with the following comment: ‘Wouldn't it be incredibly tedious after the first thousand years or so?’

Comment

Bruce Dunne, who recorded the above debate, makes the following comment on Dawkin's view of eternity: I believe it will be anything but tedious — 1 Cor. 2.9 states ‘*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for*

them that love Him.’

The complete transcript of the above programme can be found on ABC's Questions and Answers which was screened on 7/3/2010.

Points to consider

Bruce Dunne's notes or points to consider:

(a) Professor Dawkin's answer didn't satisfy me. If the evolutionary theory is correct then the first book of the Bible, Genesis, can't be true, because it teaches that ‘*the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground.*’ We return to dust in the grave and this supports the Biblical teaching that we originally came from dust. ‘*It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.*’ (Ps 118.8)

(b) The age of the earth is a subject not entirely agreed on by all Christians. For me personally, I'm more than happy to accept Genesis Chapter One as being literally true.

(c) When Jesus came to earth He indicated that some Old Testament

measures were necessary because of man's ‘hardness of heart.’ Regarding the penalty for adultery, we see how Jesus softened the blow by inviting those without sin to cast the first stone.

(d) Jesus' life, example, teaching and finally death, gave us a perfect picture of the manner of love and compassion that God would like to see in each one of us.

(e) Professor Dawkin's outright rejection of Christ's sacrificial death, if unchanged, can only result in his hearing those condemnatory words ‘*Depart from me. I never knew you.*’ (Matt 7.23)

Perhaps here is the opportunity for Christians to uphold this matter in prayer, and to pray that God, in His mercy, may do a work in this man's heart, similar to what He has already done in ours.

Bruce Dunne is an emeritus elder of the Hunter congregation.

Prescribed Search / Youth Work

MAY 2010

SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE

Intermediate omit questions 7 and 8

MATTHEW 8

1. What did the leper say to Jesus and how did Jesus answer? (2 verses)
2. Why did Jesus marvel at the centurion's faith?
3. Write out the verse in Isaiah 53 which was fulfilled by Jesus' healing the sick.
4. What did Jesus say and do when the disciples woke him during the storm?
5. When the two men possessed with demons met Jesus, what did they say to him?
6. What happened to the swine when the demons went into them?

Chapter 9;1--13

7. What did Jesus do in order to show that he had power to forgive sins? How did the sick man respond? (2 verses)
8. How did Jesus answer when the Pharisees asked why he ate with sinners? (2 verses)

JUNIOR

MATTHEW 8

1. What did Jesus say as he touched the leper?
2. When Jesus told the centurion he would come and heal his servant, what was the centurion's answer? (2 verses)
3. What did Jesus do when his disciples woke him during the storm?
4. What happened to the swine after the demons went into them?

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

Children under the Banner

What's an Idol?

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



There are many kinds of idols. God told Jeremiah what an idol was like and then Jeremiah told the Israelites. Unscramble the words above and then draw a picture that matches Jeremiah's description. (You can read the description in Jeremiah 10:5.)



Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

FAMILY CAMP

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**Brochures with further details available soon.
Please pray for God's help and blessing (Youth & Fellowship Committee)**

Churches in the Banner

Impressions of the 2010 Banner of Truth Conference

The Banner of Truth Australian Conference continues to be a success in every way. The teaching is solid and unapologetically Reformed. The fellowship is affectionate and wide-ranging. Indeed, the presence of brethren from slightly different theological traditions is a healthy sign of true spiritual fraternity in Christ. Among the excellent topics discussed, the biographical paper on the life and ministry of Marcus Loane really stood out for me. The presentation was engaging, well-researched, and spiritually stimulating. Allan Blanch did a great job in fomenting a fresh recognition of Loane's devotion to the God of the gospel. In terms of attendance, a number of young pastors were part of the conference. This not only reflects a special interest in the distinctive contributions of the Reformed tradition, but also a growing passion to promote God-exalting preaching in the local church. In fact, many are using their skills of social networking to spread a deeper hunger for God. My time at the conference was something extremely beneficial. And I'm really thankful for the teaching and the good relationships with others who share the same love and commitment to serve Christ.

Andres Miranda

Manning River News

Our Pastor, Rev George Ball and his wife Rhoda are presently in Northern

Ireland for a well earned holiday. In their absence Rev John Cromarty and Rev Ray Murray are supplying the pulpit.

In March David and Heather Wilson organised a car rally which took us through Taree, Wingham and Tinnonee, finding answers to questions. The drive ended at the manse where about 35 enjoyed a barbecue lunch.

The winners were the car driven by Marshall and Lynne Reed.

The Congregation was recently saddened at the loss of longstanding elder, Mr Keith Longworth. Our prayers and sympathy are with his wife Trix.

Jim Cromarty.

Death of Mr Keith Longworth

Keith Lachlan Longworth passed away on 23 February, aged 80.

Keith had lived all his life on the Manning. His early years were spent at the family property at Harrington Road, Coopernook. With his father Frank and brother Jack, he went into the grass seed business (F. L. Longworth & Co.) They used various leftover equipment from World War 2 to build a fleet of modified jeeps to harvest paspalum and carpet grass seed from their own farm at Ghinni, other paddocks around the Manning, and areas elsewhere in NSW. They were cleaned, dried, refined and packed for export at their factory at Coopernook. There was a strong market demand in

USA. Like his father and brother, Keith was practical and an innovator, often fabricating pieces of equipment they needed. Keith left the business in 1988 due to back problems. Jack and his two sons David and Peter continue in the business.

Keith attended camps in Sydney run by the Postal Sunday School Movement as a teenager, which sparked the development of a strong Christian faith. He was involved in the summer Beach Missions at Harrington since 1950, and commenced a weekly Sunday School at Harrington for local children - it continued for 21 years. He also began distributing Bibles, Christian books and literature on the Manning, on behalf of Christian Literature Crusade.

This brought him into contact with Beatrice Murray, a Manning girl who had studied at Sydney Missionary & Bible College in Sydney and returned to Taree to open a bookshop - Christian Literature Centre. They combined their stock, married in 1958, and established the shop which operated at 65 Victoria Street until 1975. He and Beatrice lived in a house behind the shop, before moving first to High Street, then to Wynter Street in Taree.

Keith was an Elder of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (Free Presbyterian) for many years, representing the Manning area churches at annual national synods.

Banner of Truth Conference (cont.)*Banner of Truth 2010 Attendees*

He preached and led Bible study groups regularly in the congregation at Tinonee, Wingham and Bunyah, as well as at the church in Taree. For many years Keith faithfully carried out the duties of Congregational treasurer. He was recently awarded the title Elder Emeritus, in recognition of his long and significant service to the church. Keith had been ordained to the eldership on 4 May, 1975. With his wife, he had a lifelong passion for the Christian gospel to be distributed through books and recordings of talks, particularly to younger people.

Keith had an enthusiasm for flying, and qualified for his commercial pilot's licence. With his wife he enjoyed travel throughout Australia and overseas, and in 1985 was able to visit relatives in Ireland. His work on family history gave him a great deal of pleasure. He was also a computer enthusiast, and loved technology and "gadgets".

On Friday, 26 February a very large congregation of wider family and

friends paid its respects to Keith at his funeral. Rev George Ball spoke from



words of Jesus, chosen by Keith for this time: These words were very dear to Keith:

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes on him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a

time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live" (John 5:24,25).

Rev Ball noted that Keith was a man whose life was for Christ; he was in Christ and now he was with Christ. This was in full agreement with Keith's Christian hope, for on the occasion of his 80th birthday after a series of strokes he wrote and distributed a printed speech which included the sentence, "So when it comes for the time of my demise, do not grieve for me; for according to Christ's promise I will be gloriously alive with Him for all eternity."

The Congregation sang appropriate portions of Psalms 37 and 73.

At the Tinonee graveside Rev Ball comforted family and friends with words from 1 Thessalonians 4 - 'We do not grieve as those without hope.' The Rev Ray Murray assisted at the graveside.